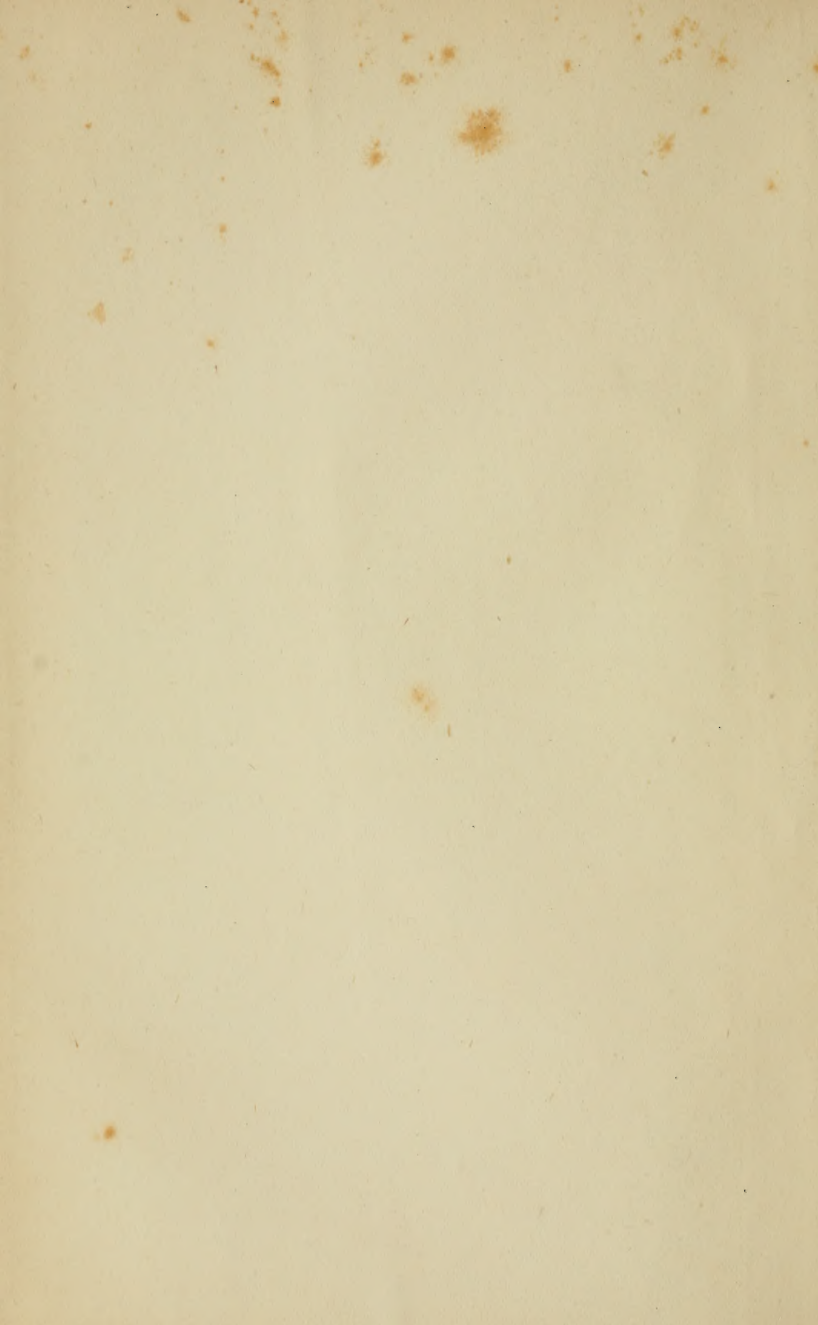


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HINTON'S
THEOLOGICAL WORKS
IN SIX VOLUMES.

THE
THEOLOGICAL WORKS

OF THE REV.

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JOHN HOWARD HINTON, M.A.

In Six Volumes.

VOLUME IV.

PRACTICAL DIVINITY.

LONDON :
HOULSTON & WRIGHT, PATERNOSTER ROW.

—
1865.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE first portion of the present Volume—entitled ELEMENTS OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY—consists of a paper written at the request of the Editors of the Oxford *Encyclopædia*, and published in that work in the year 1828. It has never been published in a separate form; but I hope it will not be deemed unsuitably placed in this edition of my Theological Works.

This paper is followed by two Sermons: the former of them preached before the friends of the Stepney Academical Institution, in June, 1826, on *Completeness of Ministerial Qualification*; and the latter of them preached to my own people at Reading, in December, 1828, on *The Means of Religious Revival*—a subject then exciting general attention.

Then follow two courses of Lectures, developing at greater length the same subject. The Lectures were delivered monthly on a week-evening during the years 1830 and 1831, and each was published immediately on its delivery. On their completion they formed two small volumes, entitled respectively—*Individual Effort for the Conversion of Sinners enforced*; and *The Active Christian, or Individual Effort for the Conversion of Sinners directed*. These were subsequently published in one volume, under the title of *Individual Effort and the Active Christian*. These discourses are

to me an affecting memorial of a period of general religious excitement—too transient, alas! and unproductive—to which they owed their origin; but the topics treated of are not of temporary or evanescent interest.

The Volume is concluded by a paper of a practical kind, written at the desire of the Young Men's Christian Association, and appearing in the volume published by them in 1851, entitled *THE USEFUL ARTS, THEIR BIRTH AND DEVELOPMENT*. It forms Chapter VII. of that work, and its full title is as follows—*On the Elements supplied by the Holy Scriptures for the Formation of an Industrial Character, Individual and National*.

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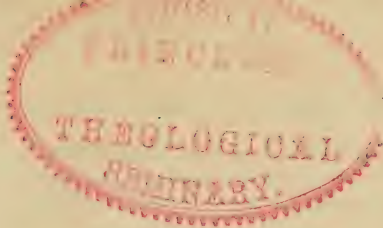
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ELEMENTS
OF
MORAL PHILOSOPHY.

REPRINTED FROM THE
OXFORD ENCYCLOPÆDIA.



ELEMENTS OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY.

MORAL philosophy has been defined the science of duty, or the science which teaches the duty of mankind. It presents only two principal divisions. In the first part we shall exhibit the principles of the science; in the second, their application to the affairs of human life.

PART I.

OF THE PRINCIPLES OF MORAL SCIENCE.

ON this part of the subject many writers have most unreasonably divided the law of nature from the precepts of revelation; some industriously declining the mention of Scripture authorities as belonging to a different province, and others reserving them for a separate volume: which appears much the same defect as if a commentator on the laws of England should content himself with stating upon each head the common law of the land, without taking any notice of acts of parliament; or should choose to give his readers the common law in one book, and the statute law in another. "When the obligations of morality are taught," says a pious and celebrated writer, "let the sanctions of Christianity never be forgotten; by which it will be shown that they give strength and lustre to each other; religion will appear to be the voice of reason, and morality the will of God." Mr. Hume, indeed, in his fourth Appendix to his Principles of Morals, has been pleased to complain of the modern scheme of uniting ethics with the Christian theology. Those who find themselves disposed to join in this complaint will do well

to observe what Mr. Hume himself has been able to make of morality without this union. And for that purpose let them read the second part of the ninth section of the above essay; which part contains the practical application of the whole treatise, a treatise which Mr. Hume declares to be incomparably the best he ever wrote. When they have read it over, let them consider whether any motives there proposed are likely to be found sufficient to withhold men from the gratification of lust, revenge, envy, ambition, avarice; or to prevent the existence of these passions. "Unless they rise up from this celebrated essay with very different impressions upon their minds than it ever left upon mine," says Dr. Paley, "they will acknowledge the necessity of additional sanctions. But the necessity of these sanctions," he adds, "is not now the question. If they be in fact established, if the rewards and punishments held forth in the Gospel will actually come to pass, they must be considered. Those who reject the Christian religion are to make the best shift they can to build up a system, and lay the foundations of morality, without it; but it appears a great inconsistency in those who receive Christianity, and expect something to come of it, to endeavour to keep all such expectations out of sight in their reasonings concerning human duty."

This method of proceeding can derive no countenance from the most ancient state of the science. The only authentic record of the earliest ages of the world represents all the nations of the earth as having sprung from one pair, and that pair as having been instructed in their duty by their beneficent Creator. The precepts of morality, therefore, would be conveyed from one generation to another, not in a systematic or scientific form, but as the laws of the universal sovereign, whose authority demanded implicit obedience. Accordingly, we find that the first teachers of morals formed collections of maxims derived from their ancestors. Such were the Proverbs of Solomon, the Words of Agur, and the Wisdom of the son of Sirach. These instructors did not analyze the human mind into its various faculties, and build a system of maxims either upon a particular instinct pointing to the supreme good, or upon the fitness of things discovered by reason. Short isolated sentences were the mode in which they conveyed their precepts; which they prefaced by observing "that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of

knowledge," and enforced by the assurance that length of days, prosperity, and peace, should they add to those who obeyed them. The sayings of the celebrated wise men of Greece were collections of apophthegms made in the same manner. Thales and Pythagoras, who founded, the one the Ionic, and the other the Italic school, made collections of precepts for the conduct as well of a state as of private life. "Neither the crimes nor the thoughts of bad men," said Thales, "are concealed from the gods." Of Pythagoras it is related that he repaired to Delos, and, after presenting an offering to Apollo, there received, or pretended to receive, moral truths from the priestess; truths which he afterwards delivered to his disciples under the character of divine precepts. The great object of Socrates, also, was to connect moral maxims with impressive ideas of the character and government of a Supreme Being.

To maxims or apophthegms, which, for the sake of delighting the ear and aiding the memory, were sometimes delivered in verse, succeeded, as has been supposed, the mode of instruction by fable, or allegory. But the truth seems to be that this method of communicating moral and political wisdom was as ancient as the other; for we have a beautiful specimen of it in the ninth chapter of the book which relates the transactions of the judges of Israel. The fables of Æsop, too, which were written at a very early period, remain lasting models of this species of art among the Greeks.

Theories of Morals.

Socrates left no writings behind him, nor did he, as far as we know, offer any regular and complete theory of ethics. His disciples, however, who were numerous and distinguished, became the founders of the celebrated Greek sects. Among them the first great question was, What are the foundations of virtue? and the second, What are the distinctions betwixt good and evil, happiness and misery? The answers given to these important questions divided the philosophers and their disciples into distinct orders; and, before we proceed to lay down what we regard as the fundamental principles of the science of morals, we will take a brief survey of the endless mazes in which their attempts at theory involved them.

In answer to the former question, Plato taught that virtue is to be pursued for its own sake ; and that, being a divine attainment, it cannot be taught, but is the gift of God. His solution of the second question is this : " Our highest good consists in the contemplation and knowledge of the first good, which is mind, or God ; and all those things which are called good by men are in reality such only so far as they are derived from the first and highest good. The only power in human nature which can acquire a resemblance to the supreme good is reason ; and this resemblance consists in prudence, justice, sanctity, and temperance." Aristotle, the founder of the Peripatetic school, was the pupil of Plato ; but of the two great moral questions he gives solutions somewhat different from those of his master. " Virtue," according to him, " is either theoretical or practical. Theoretical virtue consists in the due exercise of the understanding ; practical, in the pursuit of what is right and good. Practical virtue is acquired by habit and exercise." With respect to happiness, or good, the doctrine of Aristotle is that pleasures are essentially different in kind. Disgraceful pleasures are wholly unworthy of the name. The purest and noblest pleasure is that which a good man derives from virtuous actions. Happiness, which consists in a conduct conformable to virtue, is either contemplative or active. Contemplative happiness, which consists in the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, is superior to active happiness, because the understanding is the higher part of human nature, and the objects on which it is employed are of the noblest kind. The happiness which arises from external possessions is inferior to that which arises from virtuous actions ; but both are necessary to produce perfect felicity.

The Stoics, another celebrated sect of Greek philosophers, maintained that nature impels every man to pursue whatever appears to him to be good. According to them, self-preservation is the first law of animated nature. All animals necessarily derive pleasure from those things which are suited to them ; but the first object of pursuit is not pleasure, but conformity to nature. Every one, therefore, who has a right discernment of what is good, will be chiefly concerned to conform to nature in all his actions and pursuits. This is the origin of moral obligation. With respect to happiness, or good, they taught that all external things are indifferent, and cannot

affect the happiness of man; that pain, which does not belong to the mind, is no evil; and that a wise man will be happy in the midst of torture, because virtue itself is happiness.

Aristippus, the founder of the Cyrenaic school, and Democritus and Protagoras, with their followers among the atomists, taught that the distinction between virtue and vice is merely arbitrary; that nothing is just or unjust but as it is agreeable or contrary to established laws and customs; that what is just to-day human authority may make unjust to-morrow; and that present pleasure is the sovereign good of man. According to Epicurus, the end of living, or the ultimate good which is to be sought for its own sake, is happiness. The happiness which belongs to man is that state in which he enjoys as many of the good things, and suffers as few of the evils, incident to human nature as possible, passing his days in a smooth course of tranquillity. Pleasure is in its own nature good, as pain is in its nature evil. The one is, therefore, to be pursued, and the other to be avoided, for its own sake. Pleasure and pain are not only good and evil in themselves, but they are the measures of what is good or evil in every object of desire or aversion; for the ultimate reason why we pursue one thing and avoid another is because we expect pleasure from the former, and apprehend pain from the latter. That pleasure, however, which prevents the enjoyment of a greater pleasure, or produces a greater pain, is to be shunned; and that pain which either removes a greater pain, or procures a greater pleasure, is to be endured.

These several systems of ethics continued to be cultivated with more or less purity through all the revolutions of the Grecian states, and they were adopted by the Romans after Greece itself became a province of the empire. They had been introduced into Egypt during the reigns of the Ptolemies, and were taught with much celebrity in the schools of Alexandria. The philosophy which was most cultivated in those schools was that of Plato; but, from a desire of uniformity which took possession of the Alexandrian Platonists, many of the dogmas of Aristotle and Zeno, as well as the extravagant fictions of the East, were incorporated with the principles of the old academy. The patrons of this heterogeneous mass have been called Eclectic philosophers, because they professed to select from each system those doctrines

which were rational and important, and to reject everything which was false or futile. After the subversion of the Roman empire, every species of philosophy, unless syllogistic wrangling deserves that name, was banished for ages from the schools of Europe; and ethics, properly so called, gave place to ecclesiastical casuistry, and to the study of the civil and canon laws. When the Greeks, whom the fury and fanaticism of Mahomet II. had driven from Constantinople, introduced into Italy the knowledge of their own language, the cabinets of ancient philosophy were again unlocked; the systems of the different sects were adopted with the utmost avidity; and, without accurate investigation of their respective merits, men became Platonists, Peripatetics, or Stoics, as fancy or caprice prompted them to choose their leaders. The *ἀντος ἐφή* of Aristotle, in particular, had not less authority over his modern admirers than it had of old in the Lyceum at Athens. At length the spirit of Luther and the genius of Bacon broke these fetters, and taught men to think for themselves as well in science as in religion. In physics the effects produced by the writings of Bacon were great and rapid; for in physics the ancient theories were totally and radically wrong. With respect to morals, however, the case was different. Each of the celebrated schools of antiquity was in possession of much moral truth, blended, indeed, with error: and, long after the Stagyrte and his rivals had lost all influence in physical science, philosophers of eminence followed them implicitly in the science of ethics.

At this day, indeed, there is hardly a theory of morals at all distinguished, to which something very similar may not be found in the writings of the ancients. Hobbes adopted the principles of Democritus and Protagoras, and taught expressly that there is no criterion of justice or injustice, good or evil, besides the laws of each state; and that it is absurd to inquire of any person except the established interpreters of the law, whether an action be right or wrong, good or evil. According to the three admirable scholars, Cudworth, Clarke, and Price, we feel ourselves irresistibly determined to approve some actions, and to disapprove others. Some actions we cannot but conceive of as right, and others as wrong; and of all actions we are led to form some idea, as either fit to be performed or unfit, or as neither fit nor unfit to be performed, that is, as indifferent. The power

within us which thus perceives and determines they declare to be the understanding ; and they add, that it perceives or determines immediately, or by intuition, because right and wrong denote simple ideas. As there are some propositions which, when attended to, necessarily determine all minds to believe them, so are there some actions whose natures are such that, when observed, all rational beings immediately and necessarily approve them. He that can impartially attend, it is said, to the nature of his own perceptions, and determine that when he conceives gratitude or beneficence to be right he perceives nothing true of them, or understands nothing, but only suffers from a sense, has a turn of mind which appears unaccountable ; for, the more we examine, the more indisputable it will appear to us that we express necessary truth when we say of some actions that they are right, and of others that they are wrong. It is added, that we cannot perceive an action to be right without approving it, or approve it without being conscious of some degree of satisfaction and complacency ; that we cannot perceive an action to be wrong without disapproving it, or disapprove it without being displeased with it ; and that the first must be liked, the last disliked—the first loved, the last hated. By the patrons of this system, obligation to action and rightness of action are held to be coincident or identical. Virtue, they affirm, has a real, full, obligatory power, antecedently to all laws, and independently of all will ; for obligation is involved in the very nature of it. To affirm that the performance of that which to omit would be wrong is not obligatory unless conducive to private good, or enjoined by a superior power, is a manifest contradiction.

Many philosophers, among whom are Lord Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and others, have had recourse to another hypothesis. Observing that all mankind decide on the morality of characters and actions instantaneously, without weighing their consequences in the balance of reason, they suppose that such decisions are made by an instinct of our common nature, implanted in the human breast by the hand that formed it. To this instinct some of them give the name of conscience, and others that of moral sense, in contradistinction to external sense, the other great and universal inlet of human knowledge. By this moral sense we intuitively discover an essential difference in the quality of all thoughts

and actions, and a general distinction of them into good and evil, just as by the tongue and palate we discover an essential difference in the taste of all objects, and a general distinction of them into pleasant and unpleasant.

Mr. Hume blended the two preceding theories together; and, upon the broad basis of reason and internal sense co-operating with each other, he reared a system which, though different from those of all his predecessors, he rendered plausible, and supported with his usual ingenuity. According to him, sentiment and reason concur in almost all moral determinations; and he asserts that for this purpose there is implanted in the human breast a disinterested principle of benevolence, or sympathy, which makes men take pleasure in each other's happiness. The merit or demerit of actions consists wholly in their utility, or natural tendency to add to the sum of human happiness; and the same he holds to be true of qualities, whether bodily or mental. This utility, or natural tendency, it is the office of reason to discover; for that faculty alone can trace relations and consequences. Such qualities or actions as reason discovers to be useful, either to the individual or society, the instinctive principle of benevolence makes us instantly approve, and this approbation constitutes their morality. Thus temperance, fortitude, courage, industry, &c., reason discovers to be useful to him who possesses them; and upon this discovery they are approved of by the sentiment of sympathy. They are therefore moral qualities, and the sources of the private virtues. In like manner, generosity, cheerfulness of temper, mercy, and justice, are discovered to be useful to society, and are accompanied with the approbation of that sentiment of sympathy which makes every man feel a satisfaction in the felicity of all other men. They therefore constitute the social virtues. Of every quality and every action the merit or demerit, and, by consequence, the degree of approbation or disapprobation which is bestowed upon it, is in exact proportion to its utility and the circumstances of the case in which it occurs. The social virtues are, therefore, greater than those which are private, and one social virtue is greater than another; but every quality and every action which is useful, either to society or to the individual, is more or less virtuous, provided the good of the individual be considered as subordinate to the good of the public.

There is also a system of what may be called metaphysical morals; the advocates of which raise their whole superstructure of duty by induction from an analysis of the intellectual and active powers of man. By this process they arrive at the following conclusions: viz., that a man is then only in a state of moral obligation when he feels that his conduct, according to its nature, will be connected with his own approbation or condemnation, and will deserve the approbation or condemnation of others; and that the just economy of human nature, the very perfection of virtue, consists in a regular subordination of the passions and affections to the authority of conscience, and the direction of reason.

These various theories we have exhibited without comment. Our limits will not allow us to enter on such arguments as might effectually expose the error; and all that is true, we trust, will be found substantially embodied in the principles of moral science we are now about to lay down. The system we adopt is founded on the facts of man's nature and condition, interpreted by the truths of revealed religion, of which, indeed, morality is an essential part; nor does it appear to us that any other foundation is sufficient to bear a regular superstructure of practical ethics.

Principles of Moral Science.

In laying down the principles of moral science, we are called upon to exhibit the nature, the foundation, the obligation, the rule, and the motives of virtue. In order to proceed satisfactorily, however, we must institute a brief preliminary inquiry into the moral properties of the nature and condition of man.

Of the Moral Properties of Man's Nature.

It has been strongly maintained by some philosophers that there is in mankind an instinctive moral sense, by which we are led to approve certain actions, and disapprove their contraries, solely as by impulse, and therefore without the exercise of reason. By others this has been as strongly denied; all our moral judgments, according to them, originating in education, imitation, and habit. It is obvious that these are but different interpretations of one and the

same fact, which must be admitted on all hands—namely, that every man of sound mind does approve certain actions, and disapprove the contrary. We are not at all disposed, however, to become parties in a dispute which we take to have no bearing on moral science. Whether our moral judgments are acquired or instinctive, in their present state of imperfection, uncertainty, and error, they can be of no use in moral reasonings; they can neither form a standard nor suggest a rule of conduct, but are so much the creatures of circumstance, passion, and prejudice, that they imperatively require a standard for their own regulation. From authentic accounts of historians and travellers, it appears that there is scarcely a single vice which, in some age or country of the world, has not been countenanced by public opinion: that in one country it is esteemed an office of piety in children to sustain their aged parents, in another to despatch them out of the way; that suicide in one age of the world is heroism, in another felony; that theft, which is punished by most laws, by the laws of Sparta was not unfrequently rewarded; that the promiscuous commerce of the sexes, although condemned by the regulations and censure of all civilized nations, is practised by the savages of the tropical regions without reserve, compunction, or disgrace; that crimes of which it is no longer permitted us even to speak, have had their advocates amongst the sages of very renowned times; that, if an inhabitant of the polished nations of Europe is delighted with the appearance, wherever he meets with it, of happiness, tranquillity, and comfort, a wild American is no less diverted with the writhings and contortions of a victim at the stake. Even amongst ourselves, and in the present improved state of moral knowledge, we are far from a perfect consent in our opinions or feelings. Thus we find that duelling is alternately reprobated and applauded, according to the sex, age, or station of the person you converse with; that the forgiveness of injuries and insults is accounted by one sort of people magnanimity, by another meanness; that in the above instances, and perhaps in many others, moral approbation follows the fashions and institutions of the country we live in; which fashions also and institutions themselves have grown out of the exigencies, the climate, situation, or local circumstances of the country, or have been set up by the authority of an arbitrary chieftain, or the

unaccountable caprice of the multitude. We suspect, therefore, that a system of morality built upon instincts will only find out reasons and excuses for opinions and practices already established, and will seldom correct or reform either. But, suppose we admit the existence of these instincts, what is their authority? No man can act in deliberate opposition to them without a secret remorse of conscience. But this remorse may be borne with: and, if the sinner choose to bear with it for the sake of the pleasure or profit which he expects from his wickedness, or finds the pleasure of the sin to exceed the remorse of conscience, of which he alone is the judge, and concerning which, when he feels them both together, he can hardly be mistaken, the advocate of the moral instincts, so far as we can understand, has nothing more to offer. For, if he allege that these instincts are so many indications of the will of God, and consequently presages of what we are to look for hereafter, this is to resort to a rule and a motive ulterior to the instincts themselves. This celebrated question, therefore, becomes in our system a question of pure curiosity.

All that is important to ethical science in the moral constitution of man, is the fact that mankind are capable of forming moral notions, or, which is the same thing, notions of right and wrong. The truth of this position is manifest from the multitude of instances in which men do express such notions, in the judgments they form (whether correctly or not is immaterial to our argument) of the conduct of themselves or others. It is manifest, also, from experience, that these moral notions are not merely of a speculative kind, but that they are of a most direct and powerful practical tendency, urging to the conduct approved and deterring from the contrary. This is one ground on which man is regarded as a moral agent. Of two actions presented to him, judging one to be right and the other to be wrong, his conduct in the case, if his own choice, has necessarily a moral character, since it involves an exercise of the moral part of his nature. It is essential, however, that it should be his own choice; for the performance either of good or evil not willingly, but by constraint, can attach neither praise nor blame to the agent. Moral agency implies free agency; and this, accordingly, is to be regarded as another of the moral properties of our nature.

It will not be expected that we should enter largely into the controversy on which our readers will perceive we are now touching. Few, if any, deny, or even doubt, that, in fact, man is so far a free agent as to be a moral and responsible one. The debated question relates to the nature of human freedom. On one side it is thought indispensable to the liberty of human actions that the will should have power to determine itself; on the other it is maintained that, while the will determines our actions, it is itself determined by motives. The latter position comprises the sum of the philosophical doctrine of necessity, the former, of liberty. For our own part, we must confess that the kind of freedom contended for by the advocates of liberty appears incomprehensible, and even impossible; nor can we perceive anything incompatible with freedom in the necessity stated above. This, as Dr. Clarke observes, is a necessity, not of nature or of fate, but of fitness and wisdom; a necessity consistent with the greatest freedom and most perfect choice; for the only foundation of this necessity is such an unalterable rectitude of will, and perfection of wisdom, as makes it impossible for a wise being to act foolishly. "Though God is a most perfect and free agent," says the same author, "yet he cannot but do always what is best and wisest on the whole. The reason is evident; because perfect wisdom and goodness are as steady and certain principles of action as necessity itself; and an infinitely wise and good being, endued with the most perfect liberty, can no more choose to act in contradiction to wisdom and goodness than a necessary agent can act contrary to the necessity by which it is actuated; it being as great an absurdity and impossibility in choice for infinite wisdom to choose to act unwisely, or infinite goodness to choose what is not good, as it would be in nature for absolute necessity to fail of producing its necessary effect."

We may apply this idea to human agents in the words of Mr. Locke. "It is not a fault, but a perfection of our nature, to desire, will, and act, according to the last result of a fair examination. This is so far from being a restraint or diminution of freedom, that it is the very improvement and benefit of it: it is not an abridgment, it is the end and use, of our liberty; and the further we are removed from such a determination the nearer we are to misery and slavery. A

perfect indifference in the mind not determinable by its last judgment of the good or evil that is thought to attend its choice, would be so far from being an advantage and excellency of any intellectual nature, that it would be as great an imperfection as the want of indifferency to act or not to act till determined by the will would be an imperfection on the other side. It is as much a perfection that desire, or the power of preferring, should be determined by good, as that the power of acting should be determined by the will; and the more certain such determination is, the greater the perfection. Nay, were we determined by anything but the last results of our own minds judging of the good or evil of any action, we were not free. The very end of our freedom being that we might attain the good we choose; and, therefore, every man is brought under a necessity, by his constitution as an intelligent being, to be determined in willing by his own thought and judgment what is best for him to do; else he would be under the determination of some other than himself, which is want of liberty. And to deny that a man's will in every determination follows his own judgment, is to say that a man wills and acts for an end he would not have at the same time that he wills and acts for it. For, if he prefers it in his present thoughts before any other, it is plain he then thinks better of it, and would have it before any other; unless he can have and not have it, will and not will it, at the same time—a contradiction too manifest to be admitted. If to break loose from the conduct of reason, and to want that restraint of examination and judgment that keeps us from doing or choosing the worse, be liberty, madmen and fools are the only free men. Yet I think nobody would choose to be mad for the sake of such liberty, but he that is mad already."

We will only say further, that, in the prosecution of this subject, it is highly important to keep in view the distinction between physical and moral impediments of action. By the advocates of liberty these are generally, perhaps industriously, confounded; but we are persuaded that, as the difference between them is decisively and broadly marked, so a steady eye to this difference will guide us most easily and safely through the principal mazes of the controversy.

We shall present our readers with the opinion on this subject of a very acute writer (Bishop Horsley), who states

some important considerations which ought to be taken into view by disputants on both sides of the question. "So far as these necessitarians maintain the certain influence of moral motives as the natural and sufficient means whereby human actions, and even human thoughts, are brought into that continued chain of causes and effects which, taking its beginning in the operations of the Infinite Mind, cannot but be fully understood by him, so far they do service to the cause of truth; placing the great and glorious doctrines of foreknowledge and providence, absolute foreknowledge and universal providence, upon a firm and philosophical foundation." Thus far we profess ourselves the advocates for necessity, and we assent fully to the following observations, which are both just and profound. "But when they go beyond this, when they would represent this influence of moral motives as arising from a physical necessity, the very same which excites and governs the motions of the inanimate creation, here they confound nature's distinctions, and contradict the very principles they would seem to have established. The source of their mistake is this, that they imagine a similitude between things which admit of no comparison, between the influence of a moral motive upon the mind and that of mechanical force upon matter. A moral motive and a mechanical force are both indeed causes, and equally certain causes each of its proper effect; but they are causes in very different senses of the word, and derive their energy from the most opposite principles. Force is only another name for an efficient cause; it is that which impresses motion upon body, the passive recipient of a foreign impulse. A moral motive is what is more significantly called the final cause, and can have no influence but with a being that proposes to itself an end, chooses means, and thus puts itself in action. It is true that, while this is my end and while I conceive these to be the means, a definite act will as certainly follow that definite choice and judgment of my mind, provided I be free from all external restraint and impediment, as a determinate motion will be excited in a body by a force applied in a given direction. There is in both cases an equal certainty of the effect; but the principle of the certainty in the one case and in the other is entirely different, which difference necessarily arises from the different nature of final and efficient causes. Every cause, except it be the will of the Supreme Deity acting to

the first production of substances, every cause, I say, except this acting in this singular instance, produces its effect by acting upon something; and, whatever be the cause that acts, the principle of certainty lies in a capacity in the thing on which it acts of being affected by that action. Now, the capacity which force, or an efficient cause, requires in the object of its action is absolute inertness. But intelligence and liberty constitute the capacity of being influenced by a final cause, by a moral motive; and to this very liberty does this sort of cause owe its whole efficacy, the whole certainty of its operation; which certainty never can disprove the existence of that liberty upon which it is itself founded, and of which it affords the highest evidence."

We cannot leave this part of the subject without acknowledging our obligations to the work of President Edwards on the Will; by far the most profound work that has ever been written on the question, and, in our judgment, both unanswered and unanswerable.

Of the Moral Properties of Man's Condition.

Man is by no means an insulated being. He sustains many relations. Towards God, for example, man stands in the relation of a creature to his Creator; of a necessitous being to his benefactor. Towards his fellow-men every man bears the relation of a brother; while connubial, parental, filial, and many other relations, arise in the community.

Now the position we lay down is this: that relations mark out and require a line of conduct corresponding with their nature. That this is the doctrine of divine wisdom and authority, an appeal to the Sacred Scriptures will fully demonstrate; an exhibition of the relations he bears to us being the sole ground on which the Almighty rests either his authority to command, or the rectitude of the precepts he has given. It will appear, however, that, without a reference to this high and authoritative decision, the same truth may be elicited from the awakened feelings of the human heart. Kings, masters, and parents, are all fully of opinion that the relations they bear require a corresponding conduct from their subjects, servants, and children; and justify them in forcibly requiring it too, if withheld. Nor would any persons be reckoned of sound mind, if the exhibition of these

relations did not convey to them both instruction and incitement in their duty. To this constitutional and inevitable judgment it is that the Almighty himself appeals in vindication of his own claims: "If I be a master, where is mine honour? If I be a father, where is my fear?" Such relations as require a specific regulation of our conduct in order to its being congruous with them, are relations of a moral nature; and from the existence of such relations the moral properties of our condition arise. If, then, the relations we sustain mark out and require a line of conduct corresponding with them, here is a standard to which the words right and wrong may be referred. Actions may be right or wrong in reference to these relations, and this is the standard of rectitude. Actions which correspond to these relations are right; and actions which do not correspond to them are wrong.

Of the Nature of Virtue.

We can now answer the question, What is duty? It is the line of conduct which corresponds with the relations we sustain; and this is virtue. The celebrated question respecting the nature of virtue will of course be answered by ascertaining the leading characteristic of such conduct.

Of the Foundation of Virtue.

Of the foundation of virtue a clear view seems thus to present itself. It is founded in the relations we bear towards other beings. Had we no relation to other beings we could have had no duties towards them: the relation existing the duties also exist, the relation itself being their only adequate basis.

We are almost tempted to content ourselves with this brief statement on a subject which has excited so much discussion, and formed, according to their several views of it, the different schools of moral science. We must state our decided objection, however, to the philosophy which represents virtue to be founded in utility. Not that we doubt the actual tendency of virtue to produce happiness; we dissent only from the assertion that this tendency is the source of its obligation, or the whole sum of its virtuousness. It is a necessary but a frightful inference from this system, that

whatever is expedient is right. Dr. Paley, indeed, endeavours to shut the door which is thus opened to licentiousness, by saying that the general and ultimate consequences of an action should be taken into the account; but his own argument, which we have quoted above, against the value of the moral sense as a determining power, bears equally against his doctrine of expediency. For who can judge adequately of general and ultimate consequences? Who could, if he were truly well disposed, ascertain whether the general evil consequences would exceed the particular good? And how few are there to whom, if their knowledge was adequate, such a calculation could be securely trusted! To conduct ourselves by such a rule would require nothing less than the very benevolence and omniscience of the Deity.

Of the Obligation of Virtue.

But to proceed: From whence results the obligation of virtue upon man?

We are now approaching a part of the controversy which is of the highest moment, and on no part of it has the discussion been more laboured. The grand question is, Does the obligation of virtue arise from the moral fitness of things, or from the will of God? It may appear to our readers that our preceding observations lead to the former; and, if by the will of God be meant his preceptive will, we certainly are not disposed to adopt the latter. Upon an attentive survey of this discussion, however, we have been very much struck with the ambiguous manner in which the advocates of the latter scheme speak of the will of God. Sometimes they appear manifestly to intend his preceptive will; at others as plainly his sovereign pleasure exercised in the original constitution of all things. These are two things obviously distinct; and we cannot help thinking that a careful discrimination of them would abridge, if not annihilate, the controversy. If the advocates for the will of God do really mean that what God commands is right solely because he commands it, we demur; we should say rather that he commands it because it is right, because he knows it to be suitable to the relations he has established, of which, and the duties which flow from them, his whole preceptive will is declaratory. But, if they mean only that the Almighty in

his sovereign pleasure and wisdom originated all the relations that should be borne, and consequently all the modes of conduct which are congruous to such relations, on this point we have no dispute. And we are inclined to believe that this is common ground, on which the combatants on both sides might, without loss, lay down their arms. For, in this view, we fully agree and maintain that the obligation of virtue arises from the will of God. Every creature is under a primary and necessary obligation to be in entire and willing subjection to its Creator; and hence the obligation of man to occupy the station, to bear the relations, and to fulfil the duties involved in his condition, or arising from it. In other words, the various duties of man are binding upon him because they are appropriate to relations in which his Creator has placed him. On the other hand, we are at full liberty to inquire whether the conduct which we are, in fact, led to regard as appropriate to these relations be not, the relations themselves continuing the same, necessarily and immutably appropriate? Whether any other kind of deportment could have been enjoined without being less congruous? And these are surely questions which may be both asked and answered without either presumption or difficulty, if it be only admitted, and we suppose it will scarcely be denied, that the Almighty Maker has issued his precepts wisely, and not arbitrarily. For if so, he has chosen that which is best, most fit to the relations he has instituted; and in this all is implied that is contended for, namely, that, certain relations existing, the fitness of actions to them does not result from the divine command, but the command from their fitness as perceived by divine wisdom. This fitness therefore is necessary, and, without some change in the relations themselves, immutable.*

Of the Rule of Virtue.

From these observations it will be manifest how far the obligation of duty is connected with the knowledge of it. There is a line of conduct corresponding with every relation and required by it, whether the person bearing that relation is acquainted with it or not. In either case, therefore, it is

* See Dr. Ellis on the Knowledge of Divine Things.

his duty. The performance of duty, however, cannot be, and in the divine government is not, required, without the means of knowledge being imparted. It is true, indeed, there is among mankind lamentable ignorance of their duty; but, to a greater or less extent, the opportunities of knowledge have been afforded to all, and exactly to this extent is ignorance itself guilty, and all that may result from it.

When we speak of the rule of duty, we mean that by which our conduct should be regulated. Now, this may be effected partly by forming an idea of the general scope and aim with which life should be conducted. It will be gathered from what we have already said, that this general aim should be to act in a manner corresponding with the relations we sustain. In order to this, however, we are well aware that some further direction is necessary. How far any communication of the divine will on moral points might be necessary to man in his original state we know not; but to us the necessity is manifest and urgent, and no question respecting our duty can be satisfactorily, or at least authoritatively, answered, but by an appeal to the sacred depository of truth. The will of God, his revealed preceptive will, is the rule of duty, a rule which is entitled to decide every case, and which admits of no appeal. It is true, indeed, there are other standards, so called, of right and wrong; for example, custom, laws of honour, conscience, the law of the land: but, as there is but one supreme lawgiver, so there is but one law authoritatively decisive of right and wrong; and by an appeal to that law the rectitude of others must be decided.

Of the Motives of Virtue.

It remains for us to inquire, By what motives should our conduct be animated? To a mind rightly constituted and free from evil bias, the fitness of actions to existing relations will be a motive of no small power. Actions thus contemplated appear as possessing an intrinsic loveliness and excellence. Estimable, however, as virtuous conduct from such a motive would be, it is by no means that which ought principally to operate. We have already seen that the duties of our station are binding because our station is one in which God has placed us; the brightest aspect of virtue, then, requires that our leading motive should be a desire to fulfil

the design with which he has placed us there. Without this it is manifest that the main obligation of virtue is unfelt, nay, that the very primary obligation of our being is unfulfilled. Thus only is virtue virtuous, or the conduct of a moral agent morally good. But the Divine Being has not left us to the force of these motives alone. He has established a present connexion between virtue and happiness, between vice and misery; and, if not without exception, it is sufficient to make it our interest to fulfil our duty. He has also brought himself forward in the character of a moral governor by the promulgation of a law, enjoining our duties with the solemn weight of his supreme authority. This legislative measure is connected with momentous sanctions, referring us chiefly to a future state, in which happiness or misery of intense degree will result from our present conduct. That state is to remedy the inequalities of this, and, as its award will be final, so its duration will be everlasting.

PART II.

OF THE APPLICATION OF THE FOREGOING PRINCIPLES.

THE purposes to which the principles of moral philosophy should be applied are two: first, to the discovery; and secondly, to the practice, of virtue. The latter we must leave with an earnest recommendation to our readers themselves, in the hope, nevertheless, of rendering them some assistance, while we pursue the former: viz., the application of the principles laid down to the discovery and determination of duty in its various branches. Since all our duties imply the existence of certain relations in which they are founded, there is no method by which we shall obtain so clear a view, or form so easy and comprehensive an arrangement of them, as by inquiring into the several relations of a moral kind in which we are placed.

Of our Relation to Universal Being.

Before examining these relations in detail, we may glance at the single and all-comprehensive relation which man bears

at once to the universe and its Author. He is a creature of God, and a fellow-creature of all other beings. As this simple and primary relation branches out into innumerable others, and thus gives rise to an infinite number of duties, so there would seem to be one duty which may be regarded as comprehending all others, a duty towards universal being. This we take to be BENEVOLENCE.*

Of our Relations to God.

To speak now of our relations individually. Our primary and most important relation is that which we bear to God.

First, Of our Relation to God as our Creator.—Of all human relations to God this is the first, and the foundation of all others. The particular duties which this relation requires are these: 1. Benevolence, or good-will towards the Most High, in all that may respect his personal honour or happiness, or the successful result of his operations. No relation involves so intimate a connexion as that of a creature to its Creator; nor can anything be more abhorrent to a well-constituted mind than the hostility of any being to the author of its existence. To a case in which this is much less eminently the fact the Almighty refers us (Isaiah i. 2): “Hear, O heavens! and give ear, O earth! for the Lord hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” 2. Reverence. The relation of a creature to its Creator is a relation of infinite inferiority. Nothing can excite so sublime and boundless a feeling of superiority in any being, as to regard him in the highest sense as the author of our own. Superiority in all cases requires respect; in this case boundless respect, or, which is the same thing, reverence. 3. Subjection, or a cordial acquiescence in all that appears good in his sight. It is owing to his sovereign pleasure that we have any existence; and in the same sovereignty he has determined in what nature, with what capacities, and in what situation our existence shall be. And all this he had assuredly a right to do, or to have left undone. He vindicates the rightfulness of his own sovereignty by an appeal to mankind in a case of far less strength: “Shall the thing formed say to him that

* See President Edwards's Treatise on the Nature of Virtue.

formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. ix. 20, 21. See also Jer. xviii. 1-6.) Hence, therefore, arises our obligation to acquiesce in all dispensations of his providence, and to fulfil all indications of his will; and hence the fundamental obligation of repentance for disobedience.

Secondly, Of our Relation to God as our Preserver and Benefactor.—Of this relation there are two aspects, giving rise to corresponding duties. 1. The being we have received from God is wholly dependent upon him for its continuance and support. Hence the obligation of prayer. This is an exercise of the mind ordinarily associated with, and expressed by, forms of worship, but not dependent upon them; including the acknowledgment that God is the fountain of all good, together with requests suggested by, and agreeing with, our actual or apprehended necessities; manifestly, therefore, an exercise most fully corresponding with a relation of entire dependence. 2. Our existence is actually crowned with love, bountiful provision being made for our wants and sorrows. Hence, therefore, the obligation of thanksgiving. Every act of kindness deserves an acknowledgment; how much more goodness which manifests itself towards us in benefits of the utmost necessity, of incalculable number, of unknown magnitude, of uninterrupted constancy; the goodness, too, of him "that stoopeth to behold the things that are done in heaven."

Thirdly, Of our Relation to God as the Source of our Happiness.—It will not here be necessary to enter on the controversy to which the question of human happiness has given rise; though it is, indeed, very instructive to observe how difficult philosophers have found it to ascertain the chief good, and how contradictory their opinions have been on so interesting a subject. A grand point in this inquiry is to distinguish between happiness and pleasure. For, although it is true that happiness must comprehend a fulness of pleasure, there are yet many pleasures which bear but a very partial, or even an equivocal relation to happiness. God in his infinite goodness presents to us many pleasures, inasmuch as he has made us capable of receiving pleasure from many sources, and has furnished us abundantly with gratifications adapted to our capabilities. But it never was his design

that in these should be our happiness. We find, accordingly, that he has given us such internal powers as can never become fully satisfied, even by the whole circle of mortal joys. He has created us with a capability of knowing him, of holding mental communication with him, of deriving exquisite pleasure from his kind regard, and exquisite pain from his anger; and has, therefore, made us to bear towards himself such a relation that our happiness can be found in himself alone. "His favour is life, and his loving-kindness is better than life." As the fact is manifest from the constitution of our nature, so it is unequivocally declared by God himself: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water" (Jer. ii. 13).

1. From this relation, then, arises the obligation of delight in God, or of seeking happiness in him. In this point, indeed, more directly, as in all points more remotely, our duty coincides with our interest. It is not, however, because it is our interest that it is our duty. To seek happiness elsewhere than in God is both sin and folly, but it is not sin *because* it is folly. It is folly because it is labour lost; and sin, because it violates God's established system, according to which he is actually become, and requires to be regarded as, the fountain of bliss.

2. From this relation arises also the duty of self-denial, or of relinquishing whatever may be inconsistent with our making God the supreme source of our happiness; and this is the ground on which all the divine precepts rest which enjoin sacrifice, or self-denial, in reference to this object.

Fourthly, Of our Relation to God as a Relation of Trust.—It is manifest that our powers, both bodily and mental, may become the objects of our own conduct; life may be either cherished, or exposed to hazard, or destroyed; the mind may be either cultivated, or neglected, or impaired. In like manner it is evident that our powers may be variously used in reference to others, being made instrumental either to the benefit or injury of mankind, and even to the honour or dishonour of the Most High. Now, these powers are committed to us in trust, either as deposits to be carefully preserved, or, as talents to be usefully employed. See especially our Lord's Parable of the Talents, Matt. xxv. 14 *seq.*

1. From this relation, then, arise all duties to ourselves: such as,—(1) The careful preservation of our own lives and bodily powers; including a regard to health in the avoidance of needless exposure to risk, and the use of all means for its recovery when impaired; the renunciation of all practices or habits, those of intemperance for example, which tend to destroy health, or shorten life; and the endurance of life in its most calamitous circumstances, and under the strongest impulse to hasten its termination. (2) The cultivation and improvement of the powers of the mind, by no means allowing of neglect, or any practices tending to impair them; but requiring a diligent use of all means of acquiring knowledge, forming the judgment, regulating the passions, and attaining the highest intellectual and moral eminence of our nature. (3) The careful employment of all means and opportunities which may be put into our hands for the amelioration of our condition in any respect, especially of those religious advantages known as the means of grace.

2. From this relation arises also the obligation of usefulness to others. Regarding our active powers as talents requiring improvement, to suffer them in any degree to become the instruments of injury to others is manifestly most contrary to our duty. This relation of trust does not allow even of neutral conduct; since to do to others neither good nor evil is an undeniable misimprovement of powers by which much good might have been done. There is assuredly required of us an active endeavour to shed benefits around us; nor can we esteem ourselves faithful to the trust reposed in us unless these endeavours be truly proportioned to our ability.

3. From the same relation arises the duty of zeal, or active devotedness to the honour of the Divine Being. Of this also he has made us capable; and the right improvement of a talent requires that it should be applied to its whole use. Of course, the perversion of our powers to disobedience is a flagrant violation of duty; but even a correct observation of his preceptive will does not amount to the fulfilment of our obligation; nor can anything do so, but zealously laying ourselves out for the advancement of his honour in the world.

Fifthly, Of our Relation to God as our Moral Governor.—In this relation we regard the Divine Being as our lawgiver and our final judge. As a lawgiver, we have already said

that his law consists principally of a declaration of the relations we bear, and of the duties resulting from them; and the few instances in which this is not the case are positive precepts, originating more immediately in his own good pleasure, but enforced by the same motives. His coming forth as a lawgiver and judge in reference to this line of conduct, informs us that he is determined to require that which it is so reasonable to yield: so that from our relation to God as moral governor no new duties arise; it is rather the grand relation formed by the combination of all the rest, the majestic attitude in which the Almighty places himself for the security of that to which his infinite elevation entitles him.

In this sketch of our duties towards God, it may be observed that no direct mention has been made of love. The import of this term is, in truth, so comprehensive, and the state of feeling it denotes resolves itself inevitably into such distinct emotions, that it was felt more appropriate, as well as more easy, to exhibit the several parts which compose it than the whole in one view. The whole, however, will be found to result from the combination of benevolence, complacency, and gratitude.* It may be observed, also, that we have said nothing of the moral attributes of the Deity; and it is for this reason, that they do not appear to be the foundation of his claims. Without any consideration of these, it must be maintained that the ground of duty is immovably established in the eternal supremacy of Jehovah, but it is unspeakably to our happiness that the Sovereign Supreme is in moral character infinitely excellent and glorious. Hence arise additional and most powerful motives to every duty that we owe him; and hence to every neglect or violation of duty is attached a more heinous guilt.

We are well aware that we have gone much beyond the usual statements of writers on moral philosophy in reference to the duties we owe to God. If, however, we were to touch on the subject at all, we could not confine ourselves to the external duties required by him who is a Spirit, whose relations to us are eminently spiritual, and who considers himself as receiving no service which is not rendered in spirit and in truth.

* See Dwight's System of Theology, vol. iii., p. 355 seq.

Of our Relations to Mankind.

Of these, which form the second class of our relations, it will devolve upon us to give some more particular account than it was proper in this place to give of the former; we shall proceed, however, in the same course, taking the relations of mankind to each other in the order in which they naturally arise.

Keeping in view the origin of mankind, the relation which every man bears to the rest of the species is obviously the first of all human relations; that which is presupposed in the existence of every other, and out of which, in fact, all others arise. This is pre-eminently a relation of community. Human beings derive their existence from a common source, God, the Father of all. They are partakers of a common nature, in its origin and essential properties everywhere the same. They are placed in a common condition, the characteristic features of life, amidst all its varieties, being substantially similar. From such a relation, therefore, arises necessarily the grand duty of benevolence, or love—of which benevolence is the first and principal aspect.

The obligation of this temper results from the relation which our fellow-creatures bear to God; since, as we have already seen, good-will to him, in his character, happiness, and works, is a duty founded in our relation to him. It follows, therefore, that good-will to mankind, who are his workmanship, is a duty we owe to God, and a deficiency in this respect a sin against him.

That such a temper is right, however, and that no man can act rightly who does not cherish it, is surely manifest from the human relation itself. The whole race of man is essentially a family, and until it can be thought right, or most congruous to such a relation, for the children of a family to be hostile towards each other, and that during the closest continuance of the family bond, it can hardly be denied that the relation existing among mankind marks out and requires, as eminently corresponding with its nature, the exercise of universal good-will.

We observe also, that, on the same ground on which benevolence becomes a duty, all the actual manifestations of

it are equally so; and of these, in fact, the whole circle of our duties will be found to consist.

Let us now turn to the several particular relations which arise among mankind out of the general one just noticed.

First, Of the Connubial Relation.—According to the scriptural account of the origin of our species, this is manifestly the first particular relation ever borne by mankind. It is founded in the constitution of the sexes, and is sanctioned by the declared design and the express authority of God himself (Gen. ii.). It is intended,—1. To contribute to the personal comfort of mankind, and scarcely more by supplying than protecting the source of it. 2. To provide for the continuance of the species, by the production of children in the greatest numbers and the most healthy condition. 3. To secure a proper and adequate attention to the welfare of children, particularly in reference to their education and settlement in life. All which benefits it manifestly tends to produce in the highest possible degree; which being the design of the connubial relation, we may hence deduce some important views of its general duties.

1. It is obvious, then, that the married state is the only one which authorizes sexual intercourse, since it is the only state in which such intercourse can answer the ends to which it is made subservient. Fornication, therefore, is in all cases to be condemned. In truth, it discourages marriage by abating, perhaps, the very chief of the inducements to it; so that it directly tends to banish this divinely-instituted state out of the world, as well as to defeat all the wise ends of its appointment. And, further than this, it converts what the Almighty designed as an instrument of good into a most productive source of mischief. Fornication supposes prostitution; and prostitution brings and leaves the victims of it to almost certain misery. Fornication produces habits of ungovernable lewdness, which introduce the more aggravated crimes of seduction, adultery, violation, &c. And, however it be accounted for, the criminal commerce of the sexes corrupts and depraves the mind and moral character more than any single species of vice whatsoever. That ready perception of guilt, that prompt and decisive resolution against it, which constitutes a virtuous character, is seldom found in persons addicted to these indulgences. They prepare an easy admission for every sin that seeks it; they are, in low life, usually

the first stage in men's progress to the most desperate villanies; and in high life, to that lamented dissoluteness of principle which manifests itself in a profligacy of public conduct, and a contempt of the obligations of religion and of moral probity. Finally, fornication perpetuates a disease which may be accounted one of the sorest maladies of human nature; and the effects of which are said to visit the constitution of even distant generations. The Scriptures give no sanction to those austerities which have been imposed upon the world under the name of Christ's religion; but, with a just knowledge of, and regard to, the condition and interest of the human species, have provided, in the marriage of one man with one woman, an adequate gratification for the propensities of their nature, and have restrained them to that gratification. Hence they condemn fornication absolutely and peremptorily. "Out of the heart," says our Saviour, "proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; these are the things which defile a man." These are Christ's own words, and one word from him upon the subject is final. It may be observed with what society fornication is classed; with murders, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. We do not mean that these crimes are all equal because they are all mentioned together; but they are all crimes. The apostles are more full upon this topic. One well-known passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews may stand in the place of all others; because, admitting the authority by which the apostles of Christ spake and wrote, it is decisive: "Marriage and the bed undefiled is honourable amongst all men; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge;" which was a great deal to say at a time when it was not agreed, even amongst philosophers, that fornication was a crime.

There is a species of cohabitation distinguishable, no doubt, from promiscuous concubinage, and which, by reason of its resemblance to marriage, may be thought to participate of the sanctity and innocence of that estate; we mean the case of kept mistresses under the favourable circumstances of mutual fidelity. This case we have heard defended by some such apology as the following: "That the marriage rite, being different in different countries, and in the same country amongst different sects, and with some scarce anything; and, moreover, not being prescribed or even mentioned in Scrip-

ture, can be accounted only as a form and ceremony of human invention; that, consequently, if a man and woman betroth and confine themselves to each other, their intercourse must be the same, as to all moral purposes, as if they were legally married: for the addition or omission of a mere form and ceremony can make no difference in the sight of God, or in the actual nature of right and wrong." To all which it may be replied, that, if the purpose of this connexion does fully coincide with the design of marriage, there are reasons of no small force to induce the observance of any form, in itself not insuperably objectionable, by which validity in a public view may be stamped upon it. The children, certainly, are left in a very degraded and unhappy situation, from which any degree of proper parental feeling would strongly urge their rescue. Let it be admitted that no rite is appointed in Scripture; the Scriptures forbid fornication, that is, cohabitation without marriage, leaving it to the law of each country to pronounce what is, or what makes, a marriage; as in like manner they forbid thefts, that is, taking away another's property, leaving it to the municipal law to fix what makes the thing property, or whose it is—which also, like marriage, depends on arbitrary and mutable forms. But if, on the other hand, the purpose of such irregular connexion does not exactly coincide with the design of marriage; if the man choose to have it in his power to dismiss the woman at his pleasure, or to retain her in a state of humiliation and dependence inconsistent with the rights which marriage would confer upon her, it is not the same thing as marriage, and is therefore wrong; since it is a violation of what God has appointed in this respect. And persons who choose to neglect what, if their designs were unblamable, would be so beneficial, cannot expect to be held clear of suspicions which have so reasonable a foundation.

It is but the counterpart of this statement to add, that the connubial relation cannot permit of any infidelity to the marriage bed.

If fornication be criminal, all those incentives which lead to it are accessories to the crime, as lascivious conversation, whether expressed in obscene or disguised under modest phrases; also wanton songs, pictures, books; the writing, publishing, and circulating of which, whether out of frolic, or for some pitiful profit, is productive of so extensive a mis-

chief from so mean a temptation, that few crimes within the reach of private wickedness have more to answer for, or less to plead in their excuse. Indecent conversation, and by parity of reason all the rest, are forbidden by St. Paul (Eph. iv. 29): "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth;" and again (Col. iii. 8): "Put off . . . filthy communication out of your mouth." The invitation or voluntary admission of impure thoughts, or the suffering them to get possession of the imagination, falls within the same description, and is condemned by Christ (Matt. v. 28): "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Christ, by thus enjoining a regulation of the thoughts, strikes at the root of the evil.

2. In this view, regulations are evidently suggested respecting the persons between whom the connubial relation may with propriety be formed. It is manifestly incongruous, for example, that a man should marry his mother; first, because such a connexion would be very ill-adapted to the ends of marriage; and more especially, secondly, because a relation already exists, giving rise to duties with which those of the new relation proposed are wholly incompatible. Such a union involves the crime of incest. The extent to which prohibitions of this kind are carried seems to depend, not on any essential criminality, but on reasons of a circumstantial nature. The first marriages among mankind were of necessity among brothers and sisters; yet that has been since forbidden by the Jewish law, nor does there appear any reason to object to the adoption of the regulations of that code on this subject. The reasons of them were doubtless wise; and they appear to be by no means of a local, but a general nature.

3. We are led to conclude, also, that polygamy is an unnatural state. A number of wives can surely contribute nothing to a man's comfort. Contests and jealousies among the wives of the same husband, with distracted affections, or the loss of all affection, in the husband himself, have been the uniform result of this state. And even supposing, what does not appear to be the fact, that something might thus be added to the number of children, in ordinary cases this would be injurious, as bearing too heavily on the means of their training and settlement. It is besides pretty clearly

intimated to be the will of God that a man should have one wife, and only one, by the creation of one pair at first, and the very near equality maintained since in the numbers of men and women. Whether simultaneous polygamy was permitted by the law of Moses seems doubtful; but, whether permitted or not, it was certainly practised by the Jewish patriarchs, both before that law, and under it. The permission, if there was any, might be like that of divorce—"for the hardness of their heart"—in condescension to their established indulgences, rather than from the general rectitude or propriety of the thing itself. The state of manners in Judea had probably undergone a reformation in this respect before the time of Christ; for in the New Testament we meet with no trace or mention of any such practice being tolerated. For which reason, and because it was likewise forbidden amongst the Greeks and Romans, we cannot expect to find any express law upon the subject in the Christian code. The words of Christ (Matt. xix. 9) may be construed by an easy implication to prohibit polygamy: for, if "whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery," he who marrieth another without putting away the first is no less guilty of adultery; because the adultery does not consist in the repudiation of the first wife (for, however unjust or cruel that may be, it is not adultery), but in entering into a second marriage during the legal existence and obligation of the first. The several passages in St. Paul's writings which speak of marriage, always suppose it to signify the union of one man with one woman. When he permits marriage to his Corinthian converts (which, "for the present distress," he judges to be inconvenient), he restrains the permission to the marriage of one husband with one wife:—"It is good for a man not to touch a woman; nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband."

4. It is further manifest that the connubial relation should be perpetual. The beneficial purposes of it respect the whole life, and require the concurrence of both parties. In its formation there is plainly no termination of it contemplated other than by death; nor can it ever be dissolved without obstructing the promotion of its intended objects. The circumstances which may suggest the desirableness of dissolving the marriage contract are either,—1. Personal imbecility, or

loss of reason. 2. Dissatisfaction or aversion, either on one side or both. 3. Injury, of various kinds or degrees. The law of Moses, for reasons of local expediency, permitted the Jewish husband to put away his wife; but whether for every cause, or for what causes, appears to have been controverted amongst the interpreters of those times. Christ—the precepts of whose religion were calculated for more general use and observation—revokes this permission (as given to the Jews “for the hardness of their hearts”), and promulges a law which was thenceforward to confine divorces to the single cause of adultery in the wife. And there is no sufficient reason to depart from the plain and strict meaning of his words. The rule was new. It both surprised and offended his disciples; yet Christ added nothing to relax or explain it. “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and whoso marrieth her that is put away doth commit adultery.” It must be admitted, indeed, that in some of the cases above-mentioned the uses of marriage are altogether unlikely to be answered. Let it be observed, however, that in many instances this would arise only from a faulty conduct in one or both parties, and perhaps from a foolish choice in the outset; and it is not difficult to perceive that evils of great magnitude would result from the permission of divorce on such grounds. The adultery of the wife, the only cause for which the marriage bond is allowed to be loosed, is evidently of a peculiar character; as tending to divert the parental exertions of the husband towards children not entitled to share them. When the cause, as in loss of reason, is an entirely providential dispensation, it is as such to be endured with resignation. Inferior causes may justify the separation of husband and wife, although they will not authorize such a dissolution of the marriage contract as would leave either at liberty to marry again: cruelty, ill-usage, extreme violence, moroseness of temper, or other great and continued provocations, make it lawful for the party aggrieved to withdraw from the society of the offender without consent.

We shall close this part of the subject by briefly stating the particular duties included in the connubial relation, in reference both to its formation and continuance.—And, first, Of its formation. 1. It should be founded in mutual esteem and affection: since these constitute the only ground either

of happiness or usefulness in the marriage state. 2. It should be entered upon with a full knowledge of its duties, and a serious design to perform them. To do otherwise is lamentably to trifle with the most important relation of life.—Secondly, Of its fulfilment. Some duties of the connubial relation pertain to both husband and wife. As, 1. Chastity, or strict fidelity to the marriage-bed. Violations of this rule tend utterly to defeat all the ends of marriage. 2. Kindness, or an habitual promptness of affectionate attention of all kinds; connected, also, with mutual forbearance, and gentleness of temper. These are necessary ingredients in the general happiness of social life, and most of all in this most intimate and lasting connexion. 3. Co-operation, or a combination of cares and counsels for the promotion of the great ends of their union. Some duties of this relation are peculiar, pertaining to one of the parties only. On the wife, for instance, it is obligatory to be obedient to her husband. The Father of all, indeed, may have made and left the sexes of human species nearly equal in their faculties, and perfectly so in their rights; but to guard against those competitions which equality, or a contested superiority, is almost sure to produce, the Christian Scriptures enjoin upon the wife obedience in terms so peremptory and absolute, that it seems to extend to everything not criminal, or not entirely inconsistent with the woman's happiness. "Let the wife," says St. Paul, "be subject to her own husband in everything." On the husband it is no less obligatory, on the other hand, to protect the weaker vessel now within his power. Not to protect her from being wronged by others only, but yet more from being injured by himself. Of the degraded state in which the wife is in many nations habitually held, and the brutal violence too often used in countries that would be thought more refined, we can only say, that, as nothing is less worthy of men, so nothing can less correspond with the design of the relation itself, or the will of its Divine Author.

Secondly, Of the Parental Relation.—This relation arises immediately out of the former, and comes therefore next to be considered. Children, we are assured on the highest authority, are "a gift from the Lord." They are, however, a gift in trust, and not merely for enjoyment. The relation necessarily gives birth to an obligation to train them up with care and wisdom; and this obligation is enforced by express

declarations of the divine will. The duties which parents owe to their children are the following:

1. Maintenance, including the careful preservation of life and health, with adequate provision (to their utmost ability) for their natural wants. From hence we learn the guilt of those who run away from their families, or (what is much the same) in consequence of idleness or drunkenness throw them upon a parish; or who leave them destitute at their death, when, by diligence and frugality, they might have laid up a provision for their support: also of those who refuse or neglect the care of their bastard offspring, abandoning them to a condition in which they must either perish or become burdensome to others.

2. Education, or the cultivation of the intellectual faculties of children. This, in a general view, is of manifest importance and necessity, and has been already shown to be one principal end of the matrimonial alliance. In no instance, even among the lowest orders of society, is it consistent with this duty to suffer children to grow up in ignorance. The art of reading should without exception be esteemed a necessary acquisition; this should be connected with instruction in the principal branches of human duty, and with as much general knowledge as parents may have the means of communicating. To what further extent education in this view should be carried, depends on the rank in society which the parents do, or their children may, occupy. It is then only carried too far when it tends to unfit them for subsequent life. Education may be considered, also, as comprehending both instruction in some particular business by which life is to be occupied, and the formation of habits of industry. In the inferior classes of the community this principle condemns the neglect of parents who do not inure their children betimes to labour and restraint, by providing them with apprenticeships, services, or other regular employment, but suffer them to waste their youth in idleness and vagrancy, or to betake themselves to some lazy, trifling, and precarious calling: for the consequence of having thus tasted the sweets of natural liberty at an age when their passion and relish for it are at the highest, is that they become incapable for the remainder of their lives of continuous industry, or of persevering attention to anything; spend their time in a miserable struggle between the importunity of want and

the irksomeness of regular application; and are prepared to embrace every expedient which presents a hope of supplying their necessities without confining them to the plough, the loom, the shop, or the counting-house. In the middle orders of society, those parents are most reprehensible who neither qualify their children for a profession, nor enable them to live without one: and those in the highest, who, from indolence, indulgence, or avarice, omit to procure for their children those liberal attainments which are necessary to make them useful in the stations to which they are destined. A man of fortune who permits his son to consume the season of education in hunting, shooting, or in frequenting horse-races, assemblies, or other unedifying, though not vicious, diversions, defrauds the community of a benefactor, and bequeaths them a nuisance.

3. Provision, or the formation of arrangements adapted to promote the happiness of a child on entering into life. This view of parental duty would lead to the wise choice of a situation, and to such provision of a pecuniary kind as may be suitable to the circumstances of the parents. The helpless state of children seems plainly to invest their parents with such authority and power as are necessary to their support, protection, and education; but that authority and power can be construed to extend no farther than is necessary to answer those ends, and to last no longer than their weakness and ignorance continue; wherefore, the foundation or reason of the authority and power ceasing, they cease of course. Whatever power or authority, then, it may be necessary or lawful for parents to exercise during the non-age of their children, to assume or usurp the same when they have attained the maturity, or full exercise, of their strength and reason, would be tyrannical and unjust. From hence it is evident, that parents have no right to punish the persons of their children more severely than the nature of their wardship requires, much less to invade their lives, to encroach upon their liberty, or to transfer them as their property to any master whatsoever. Hence also it appears, that parents not only pervert, but exceed, their just authority, when they consult their own ambition, interest, or prejudice, at the manifest expense of their children's happiness. Of which abuse of parental power the following are instances: the shutting up of daughters and younger sons in nunneries

and monasteries, in order to preserve entire the estate and dignity of the family; or the using of any arts, either of kindness or unkindness, to induce them to make choice of this way of life themselves; or, in countries where the clergy are prohibited from marriage, putting sons into the church for the same end who are never likely either to do or receive any good in it sufficient to compensate for this sacrifice: the urging of children to marriages from which they are averse with the view of exalting or enriching the family, or for the sake of connecting estates, parties, or interests; or the opposing of marriage in which the child would probably find his happiness from a motive of pride or avarice, of family hostility, or personal pique.

Subordinate to the parental is the *filial relation*, a relation so entirely of a dependent and beneficial kind as to require on the part of children—

1. A ready and implicit submission, since there is an interval of some years between the dawning and the maturity of reason, in which it is necessary to subject the inclination of children to many restraints, and to direct their application to many employments, of the tendency and use of which they cannot judge. If children, when they are grown up, voluntarily continue members of their father's family, they are bound to observe such regulations of the family as the father shall appoint, contribute their labour to its support if required, and confine themselves to such expenses as he shall allow. The obligation would be the same if they were admitted into any other family, or received support from any other hand.

2. Honour, comprehending habitual manifestations of respect, high esteem of the virtues of parents, sacred concealment of their faults: a mode of conduct plainly suitable towards the instrumental authors of their being.

3. Gratitude, for favours certainly not small, and such as it can hardly ever be in their power fully to repay. Filial gratitude should be shown by a strict attention to the wants of parents; by a submissive deference to their authority and advice, especially by paying great regard to it in the choice of a wife, and of an occupation; by yielding to, rather than peevishly contending with, their humours, as remembering how often parents have been tried by those of their children; and, in fine, by soothing their cares, lightening their sorrows,

supporting them in the infirmities of age, and making the remainder of their life as comfortable and joyful as possible.

From the filial the *fraternal relation* arises, and this creates also its corresponding duties. Descending most immediately from the same parents, associated most intimately in the same abode, bearing a common relation, and having common objects; among brothers and sisters there should obviously be cultivated a state of most affectionate friendship, giving rise to mutual sympathy, advice, and assistance, and a generous interchange of kind offices, not only during their continuance under the paternal roof, but through the whole of life.

Thirdly, Of the Social Relations.—The social relations have evidently arisen from the dispersion and independent settlement of the first family, and the consequent multiplication of individuals and families. The duties to which they give rise relate, 1, to property, 2, to intercourse, 3, to service.

1. *Of duties relating to property.* The first objects of property were the fruits a man plucked, and the wild animals he caught; next to these the tents or houses which he built, the tools he made use of to catch or prepare his food; and afterwards weapons of war and defence. Many of the savage tribes in North America have advanced no further than this yet; for they are said to gather their harvest, and to return the produce of their market with foreigners into the common hoard or treasury of the tribe. Flocks and herds of tame animals soon became property; Abel, the second from Adam, was a keeper of sheep; sheep and oxen, camels and asses, composed the wealth of the Jewish patriarchs, as they do still of the modern Arabs. As the world was first peopled in the East, where existed a great scarcity of water, wells probably were next made property, as we learn from the frequent and serious mention of them in the Old Testament; from the contentions and treaties about them; and from its being recorded among the most memorable achievements of very eminent men that they dug or discovered a well. Land, which is now so important a part of property, which alone our laws call real property, and regard upon all occasions with such peculiar attention, was probably not made property in any country till long after the institution of many other species of property, that is, till the country became populous, and tillage began to be thought

of. The first partition of an estate which we read of was that which took place between Abram and Lot, and was one of the simplest imaginable: "If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." There are no traces of property in land in Cæsar's account of Britain; little of it in the history of the Jewish patriarchs; none of it found among the nations of North America; the Scythians are expressly said to have appropriated their cattle and houses, but to have left their land in common. Property in immovables continued at first no longer than the occupation: that is, so long as a man's family continued in possession of a cave, or his flocks depastured upon a neighbouring hill, no one attempted, or thought he had a right, to disturb or drive them out; but, when the man quitted his cave, or changed his pasture, the first who found them unoccupied entered upon them by the same title as his predecessor, and made way in his turn for any one that happened to succeed him. All more permanent property in land was probably posterior to civil government and to laws; and therefore was settled by these, or according to the will of the reigning chief. Property as now divided and possessed gives origin to duties of no small moment. But these duties must be correlative to the rights of the possessors; and it is not an easy matter to say wherein the right of property consists. It is enough for us, however, that the Supreme Lawgiver has sanctioned the existing state of property by the general reference of his command, "Thou shalt not steal:" leaving the question, What is property? to be decided, not by every man according to his own caprice or interest, but by the laws or customs of the several nations of the earth. It is then a duty to regard as sacred and inviolable whatever is the property of another; a duty not only highly suitable, but obviously necessary to the social state. "Thou shalt not steal," is a part of the most solemn declaration of human duty ever made by the Almighty. The only case in which a violation of this law can be justified is that of extreme hunger, in circumstances affording no other possibility of supply. There are cases, indeed, in which injury, or even destruction, of the property of others may be justified; as in lightening a ship in distress, or pulling down a house to prevent the spreading of a conflagration. Such proceedings are manifestly justifiable when the same property

is inevitably, or even imminently, threatened with destruction by other causes ; but, if the only or principal object answered, or intended, be the security or benefit of others, reparation should be made. All wanton injury to the property of others is, of course, highly reprehensible.

Benevolence further requires a regard, as opportunity may offer, to the preservation of the property of others, as well as our own. Most especially, however, is this important when the property of others is in our own possession, either as a deposit, or particularly as a loan. The duty of this case, if the property be inconsumable, appears in the answer to this question : If the thing lent be lost or damaged, who ought to bear the loss or damage ? If it be damaged by the use, or by accident in the use, for which it was lent, the lender must bear it ; on the contrary, if the damage be occasioned by the fault of the borrower, or by accident in some use for which it was not lent, then the borrower must make it good. The two cases are distinguished by this circumstance, that in one case the owner foresees the damage or risk, and therefore consents to undertake it ; in the other case he does not. The lending of consumable property, as corn, wine, &c., of course requires the restoration either of the property itself or its value. In reference to the lending of money, every man who borrows is bound in conscience to repay. This every man can see ; but every man cannot see, or does not, however, reflect, that he is in consequence also bound to use the means necessary to enable himself to repay it. " If he pay the money when he has it, or has it to spare, he does all that an honest man can do," and all, he imagines, that is required of him ; whilst the previous measures which are necessary to furnish him with the money he makes no part of his care, nor observes to be as much his duty as the other ; such as selling a family seat or a family estate, contracting his plan of expense, laying down his equipage, reducing the number of servants, or any of those humiliating sacrifices which justice requires of a man in debt the moment he perceives that he has no reasonable prospect of paying his debts without them. An expectation which depends upon the continuance of his own life will not satisfy an honest man, if a better provision be in his power : for it is a breach of faith to subject a creditor, when we can help it, to the risk of our life, be the event what it will ; that not being the security to which credit was given.

To the question, Is it lawful to lend money on usury? we answer that extortion in any shape is wrong, and therefore in this; but no reason seems to exist why a man should not be paid for the lending of money, as well as of any other property into which the money might be converted. The scruples that have been entertained upon this head arose from a passage in the law of Moses (Deut. xxiii. 19, 20): "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of anything that is lent upon usury; unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury, but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury." This prohibition is now generally understood to have been intended for the Jews alone, as part of the civil or political law of their nation, and calculated to preserve that distribution of property to which many of their institutions were subservient; but not to be binding upon any but the commonwealth of Israel. This interpretation is confirmed beyond all controversy by the distinction made in the law between a Jew and a foreigner:—"Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury, but unto thy brother thou mayest not lend upon usury:" a distinction which could hardly have been admitted into a law which the Divine Author intended to be of moral and of universal obligation.

2. *Of the duties relating to intercourse.* Intercourse is of two kinds, either social or commercial.

Of the duties relating to social intercourse. These are either general or particular.

The *general duties* of social intercourse include the regulation of the temper. The proper tone to be preserved in this respect may be expressed by meekness, and it may be regarded either as denoting an habitual gentleness of deportment, or as standing opposed to occasional irregularities; such as anger, either conceived on slight grounds, or too vehemently manifested, or too long retained; or revenge, which consists in the retaliation of an injury, or the indulgence of a spirit of retaliation. On this subject the directions of the Divine Lawgiver are abundant and very particular (Matt. vi. 14, 15; xviii. 34, 35. Col. iii. 12, 13. 1 Thess. v. 14, 15. Rom. xii. 19-21). From some of these passages taken separately, and still more from all of them taken together, it is evident that revenge is forbidden in every degree, under all forms, and upon every occasion. Here,

therefore, the practice of duelling receives a most decisive condemnation. We are forbidden even to refuse to an enemy the most imperfect right; "if he hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink;" which are examples of imperfect rights. If one who has offended us solicit from us a vote to which his qualifications entitle him, we may not refuse it from motives of resentment, or the remembrance of what we have suffered at his hands. His right, and our obligation which follows the right, is not altered by his enmity to us, or ours to him. It is, however, no breach of Christian charity to withdraw our company, or civility, when our doing so tends to discountenance any vicious practice. This is one branch of that extrajudicial discipline which supplies the defects and remissness of law; and is expressly authorized by St. Paul (1 Cor. v. 11): "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." The use of this association against vice continues to be experienced in one remarkable instance, and might be extended with good effect to others: the confederacy amongst women of character to exclude from their society kept mistresses and prostitutes, contributes more perhaps to discourage that condition of life, and prevents greater numbers from entering into it, than all the considerations of prudence and religion put together. We are likewise allowed to practise so much caution as not to put ourselves in the way of injury, or to invite the repetition of it. If a servant or tradesman has cheated us we are not bound to trust him again; for this is to encourage him in his dishonest practices, which is doing him much harm. Where a benefit can be conferred only upon one or few, and the choice of the person upon whom it is conferred is a proper occasion of favour, we are at liberty to prefer those who have not offended us to those who have; the contrary being nowhere required. Thus are we to fulfil the divine precept, "If it be possible, live peaceably with all men."

But what if it be not possible? Are we allowed, or forbidden, to appeal to legal decision? Much, very much, should be done to avoid law-suits; but, strongly as they are discountenanced in the Sacred Scriptures, we cannot think them wholly forbidden. St. Paul, though no one inculcated for-

givenness and forbearance with a deeper sense of the value and obligation of these virtues, did not interpret either of them to require an unresisting submission to every contumely, or a neglect of the means of safety and self-defence. He took refuge in the laws of his country, and in the privileges of a Roman citizen, from the conspiracy of the Jews (Acts xxv. 11), and from the clandestine violence of the chief captain (Acts xxii. 25). And yet this is the same apostle who reproved the litigiousness of his Corinthian converts with so much severity: "Now, therefore, there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" On the one hand, therefore, Christianity excludes all vindictive motives, and all frivolous causes of prosecution; so that, where the injury is small, where no good purpose of public example is answered, where forbearance is not likely to invite a repetition of the injury, or where the expense of an action becomes a punishment too severe for the offence; there the Christian is withholden by the authority of his religion from going to law. On the other hand, a law-suit is inconsistent with no rule of the Gospel, when it is instituted, first, for the establishing of some important right; secondly, for the procuring a compensation for some considerable damage; thirdly, for the preventing of future injury. But, since it is supposed to be undertaken simply with a view to the ends of justice and safety, the prosecutor of the action is bound to confine himself to the cheapest process that will accomplish these ends, as well as to consent to any peaceable expedient for the same purpose; as a reference, in which the arbitrators can do what the law cannot, divide the damage when the fault is mutual; or a compounding of the dispute by accepting a compensation in the gross, without entering into articles and items which it is often very difficult to adjust separately. As to the rest, the duty of the contending parties may be expressed in the following directions: Not to prolong a suit by appeals against our own conviction. Not to undertake or defend a suit against a poor adversary, or render it more dilatory or expensive than necessary with the hope of intimidating him, or wearing him out by the expense. Not to influence evidence by authority or expectation; nor to stifle any in your possession, although it make against you.

Another branch of the general duties of social intercourse is the regulation of the tongue: an object certainly of great importance, since, though a small member, the tongue is a very powerful one, and very unruly. The evil to which conversation is most liable is inconsiderateness; in consequence of which it becomes to a great extent useless, and, what is more to be lamented, mischievous. Such particularly is the habit of talking over everybody's business, and everybody's faults. The latter, especially, good feeling would strictly prohibit, excepting for beneficial ends. Far more reprehensible, however, is the malicious employment of the tongue. A person who can in this manner wilfully injure the reputation, the welfare, or the feelings of another is in heart no better than a robber or an assassin. The disguises under which slander is conveyed, whether in a whisper, with injunctions of secrecy by way of caution, or with affected reluctance, are all so many aggravations of the offence, as they manifest a more concerted and deliberate design. Equally to be avoided is the opposite extreme of a flattering tongue. It contributes to no good end, and is commonly connected with a frivolous understanding, and a settled contempt of all moral distinctions.

Another principal duty of social intercourse in this respect is veracity; but to what extent the truth should be told is a much disputed question. There is, indeed, a certain point to which we shall be carried by the general obligation of benevolence, viz., to this,—that truth should be most strictly spoken when injury would arise from falsehood. If it is on this principle alone that we proceed, however, we shall find it difficult to resolve many questions which arise on the subject. Such, for example, as these: Why should I speak the truth when it will do injury to another, or to myself; or when great benefit will result from a lie? Or what harm is there in falsehood when the end is diversion, or when nobody is deceived? We are certainly disposed to maintain that universal and most strict veracity is the duty of every man; and that it is by far the most congruous with the relative condition of mankind, since the allowance of falsehood in any instance would destroy mutual confidence, and render totally useless one of the most eminent advantages of the human species, namely, the power of enlarged communication. That the Author of our being has seen the matter in

this light is manifest from the precept, "Lie not one to another" (Col. iii. 9); and yet more strikingly in the fearful judgments with which the violation of truth has been undeniably visited. We are aware of the difficulties in which this position is involved. We are liable to be asked whether we would not deceive a robber or an assassin, to conceal our property from the former, or to divert the latter from his purpose? or whether in these and similar cases we should feel ourselves bound to declare all we know? Our answer to this is twofold. First, that the obligation to speak truth when we do speak, leaves it wholly to our choice whether we shall speak at all. Excepting in peculiar cases, we are surely at liberty to refuse information, which may be often asked by those who can make out no right to demand it. Secondly, whether all the good consequences may follow from such a refusal which we might anticipate from falsehood, is a question that requires to be solved with a reference to an all-wise and over-ruling Providence. With such a presiding Power, who himself has made truth our duty, it is surely not for us to do evil that good may come. By the laws of war, we are told, it is allowed to deceive an enemy; but we suppose it will hardly be said that the laws of war are the laws of God. War itself is a state most unnatural, a state in which all social relations are disowned, all their obligations denied, and all their duties renounced. The laws of war are merely the established customs of mankind respecting this murderous employment. It remains only for us to say, that, in whatever degree the laws of God may be applied to war, it will be matter of unfeigned joy, since they tend assuredly to banish it from the world. Parables and fables are said to be falsehood. It should be said rather that they would be so, if they were delivered as true. A fable or parable should always be stated to be what it is.

It will be seen that we judge no apology available for a servant's denying his master, for embellishments of a story, for exaggeration in the accounts given of ourselves, our acquaintance, or the extraordinary things we have seen or heard, or any of the innumerable kinds of *white lies*; and assuredly none for instances of more serious deception. It should be remembered, too, that there may be lies without literal or direct falsehood. An opening is always left for this species of prevarication, when

the literal and grammatical signification of a sentence is different from the popular and customary meaning. It is the wilful deceit that makes the lie; and we wilfully deceive when our expressions are not true in the sense in which we believe the hearer apprehends them. Besides, it is absurd to contend for any sense of words in opposition to usage; for all senses of all words are founded upon usage, and upon nothing else. Or a man may act a lie; as by pointing his finger in a wrong direction when a traveller inquires of him his road; or when a tradesman shuts up his windows to induce his creditors to believe that he is abroad: for, to all moral purposes, and therefore as to veracity, speech and action are the same, speech being only a mode of action. Or, lastly, there may be lies of omission. A writer of English history, who, in his account of the reign of Charles I., should wilfully suppress any evidence of that prince's despotic measures and designs, might be said to lie; for, by entitling his book a History of England, he engages to relate the whole truth of the history, or at least all he knows of it.

The general obligation of veracity involves the duty of a faithful observance of promises. Most certainly, no promise should be made without an intention to fulfil it. But how far are promises binding? To determine this it is of importance to know how promises are to be interpreted. Where the terms of a promise admit of more senses than one, the promise is to be performed "in that sense in which the promiser apprehended at the time that the promisee received it." It is not the sense in which the promiser actually intended it that always governs the interpretation of an equivocal promise; for, at that rate, you might excite expectations which you never meant, nor would be obliged, to satisfy. Much less is it the sense in which the promisee actually received the promise; for, according to that rule, you might be drawn into engagements which you never designed to undertake. It must, therefore, be the sense (for there is no other remaining) in which the promiser believed that the promisee accepted his promise. This will not differ from the actual intention of the promiser where the promise is given without collusion or reserve; but we put the rule in the above form, to exclude evasion in cases in which the popular meaning of a phrase, and the strict grammatical signification of the words, differ; or, in general, wherever the promiser

attempts to make his escape through some ambiguity in the expressions which he used. Now it is most true that we may make promises under a mistake, or that circumstances may alter, or that the thing promised may be unlawful, or even impossible. It cannot be affirmed, therefore, of promises indiscriminately that they ought to be fulfilled. If relinquished, however, it should never be because their performance is contrary to our interest, but only as contrary to our duty. This should be very seriously weighed, and conscientiously decided; and in all other instances, though we may have promised to our own hurt, we should be to the full as good as our word.

The necessity of relinquishing promises may in a great measure, and should, as far as possible, be prevented by caution in making them, giving no promise hastily, and qualifying every declaration as expressive only of our present intention. It should be remembered, also, that any action or conduct towards another person adapted to excite expectation, may bring him into the same state of mind as though we had given him a promise; it should therefore be carefully avoided, unless we purpose to fulfil the expectations raised; in which case we are as truly bound to do so as though an express promise had been given.

To attach the greater solemnity to a declaration, men have been, and are on some occasions, required to appeal to God as witness of their veracity. This appeal constitutes an oath. Of the unlawfulness of oaths we see no sufficient proof, though there is too much of the inexpediency of their frequent requirement. The principal question upon this subject is this: Under what obligation does an oath bring me? an obligation to do that which the terms of the oath express; or only that which the imposer of it intends? If words had no meaning the latter position might be tenable; but we conceive only in that case. It is wholly inconceivable by us, how a man can with a good conscience swear, or affirm even without an oath, that he believes what he knows he does not believe, or that he will observe rules which he purposes to violate. If there are oaths which do not express what is required, the remedy of this evil lies with the persons imposing them; and it is surely a remedy which a general refusal of such oaths would speedily procure.

A third branch of the general duties of social intercourse

may be expressed by the term hospitality, or a readiness to participate with others the necessities and comforts of life. And as the social relation embraces every person with whom intercourse may arise (a probability from which no human being is excluded), hospitality is required towards strangers. It is much to be lamented that the state of society is so corrupt as to require some caution on this point, and to give plausibility to much neglect. Nevertheless, we by no means approve the indiscriminate rejection of all who implore our alms. Some may perish by such a conduct. Men are sometimes overtaken by distress for which all other relief would come too late. Besides which, resolutions of this kind compel us to offer such violence to our humanity as may go near, in a little while, to suffocate the principle itself; which is a very serious consideration. A good man, if he do not surrender himself to his feelings without reserve, will at least lend an ear to importunities which come accompanied with outward attestations of distress; and, after a patient hearing of the complaint, will direct himself by the circumstances and credibility of the account that he receives.

The *particular duties* of social intercourse arise from the distinctions actually existing in society, and have respect to superiors, equals, or inferiors. Towards the first it is obviously proper that the leading feature of our conduct should be respect, towards the last courteousness. To a great extent our inferiors are among the poor, and to them some special duties are owing; resting both on the obligation of universal benevolence, and on the trust implied in our possession of the means of doing good. It is, then, a duty to relieve the wants and distresses of the poor, and a duty on which the Christian Scriptures are more copious and explicit than on almost any other. The methods in which this may be done are various; most obviously by gifts of money, the bestowment of which, however, should be regulated by prudence, as liable to much abuse: articles of food, clothing, &c., are much less so. The same end may be answered by professional assistance being gratuitously afforded, especially of a medicinal kind. But none can be held excused from the duty itself, which may be effectually performed by offices of kindness, in some degree laborious, indeed, but, perhaps, in no degree expensive.

Of the duties relating to commercial intercourse. As the

wants of mankind are many, and the single strength of individuals is small, they could hardly find the necessities, and much less the conveniences, of life, without uniting their ingenuity and strength in acquiring these, and without a mutual intercourse of good offices. Some men are better formed for some kind of ingenuity and labour, and others for other kinds; while different soils and climates are enriched with different productions: so that men, by exchanging the produce of their respective labours, and supplying the wants of one country with the superfluities of another, do in effect diminish the labours of each, and increase the abundance of all. This is the foundation of commerce. This state of things necessarily gives rise to many duties. The intercourse created by commerce consists mainly in the formation and execution of contracts.

In the formation of contracts, uprightness, or fair-dealing, is manifestly required. This rule is violated when a man seeks to obtain more for any commodity than he conscientiously believes it to be worth; with this view endeavouring to exaggerate its good qualities, and to conceal its faults, or disparaging what may be proposed in exchange. Attempts to take advantage of any particular circumstances by which goods may become of higher value because of greater importance to individuals, must be viewed in the same light. In contracts of hazard, the proper restriction is that neither side have an advantage by means of which the other is not aware; for this is an advantage taken without being given. In speculations in trade, or in the stocks, if I exercise my judgment upon the general aspect and posture of public affairs, and deal with a person who conducts himself by the same sort of judgment, the contract has all the equality in it which is necessary; but, if I have access to secrets of state at home, or private advice of some decisive measure or event abroad, I cannot avail myself of these advantages with justice, because they are excluded by the contract, which proceeded upon the supposition that I had no such advantage. In insurances where the underwriter computes his risk entirely from the account given by the person insured, it is absolutely necessary to the justice and validity of the contract that this account be exact and complete.

In the execution of contracts fidelity is not less requisite. It lies with the person who makes a contract to make himself

clearly understood; he is then bound to fulfil it in the sense in which he apprehended it was understood. Whatever is expected by one side, and known to be so expected by the other, is to be deemed a part of the contract.

Bargains of sale are unfaithfully executed if any deceptive weight or measure be employed; or any double meaning entertained by the seller. Many questions may arise respecting the damage of goods after sale, &c., to which the general observation is to be applied that cases of this sort are determined solely by custom; not that custom possesses any proper authority to alter or ascertain right and wrong, but because the contracting parties are presumed to include in their stipulation all the conditions which custom has annexed to contracts of the same sort: and when the usage is notorious, and no exception is made to it, this presumption is generally agreeable to the fact.

Commercial transactions are sometimes of a joint nature, and give rise to partnerships, of which the duties are that each partner should make the interest of the firm his own; and that the profits should be equally divided after the rate of the interest of money, or the value of labour, according to the nature of that which each contributes to the business.

3. *Of the duties relating to service.* By service we mean all such beneficial labour as one party is entitled to require of another; not on the general ground of good-will, but on the particular ground of some contract implied or expressed. Thus, for example, election to office implies a requisition of service, and the acceptance of such office equally supposes a consent to render it. And every man entering on an office is bound to do so with a purpose and endeavour to discharge all its duties according to the intention of the electors; or, if any such should exist, the charter or will of the founder. It is a question of some magnitude and difficulty, what office may be conscientiously supplied by a deputy. We will state the several objections to the substitution of a deputy; and then it will be understood that a deputy may be allowed in all cases to which these objections do not apply. An office may not be discharged by deputy, 1. Where a particular confidence is reposed in the person appointed to it; as the office of a steward, guardian, judge, commander-in-chief by land or sea. 2. Where the custom hinders, as in the case of schoolmasters, tutors, and of commissions in the army and navy. 3. Where

the duty cannot from its nature be so well performed by a deputy; as the deputy-governor of a province may not possess the legal authority, or the actual influence of his principal.

4. When some inconvenience would result to the service in general from the permission of deputies in such cases.

Commission constitutes another arrangement involving service, and requiring a faithful discharge of it. Whoever undertakes another man's business makes it his own, that is, promises to employ upon it the same care, attention, and diligence, that he would use if it were actually his own; for he knows that the business was committed to him with that expectation. And he promises no more than this. Therefore an agent is not obliged to wait, inquire, solicit, ride about the country, toil, or study, to seek every possibility of benefiting his employer. If he exert so much of his activity, and use such caution, as the value of the business in his judgment deserves—that is, as he would have thought sufficient if the same interest of his own had been at stake, he has discharged his duty, although it should afterwards turn out that by more activity and longer perseverance he might have concluded the business with greater advantage. This rule defines the duty of factors, stewards, attorneys, and advocates. One of the chief difficulties of an agent's situation is, to know how far he may depart from his instructions when he sees reason to believe, from some change or discovery in the circumstances of his commission, that his employer, if he were present, would alter his intention. The latitude allowed to agents in this respect will be different according as the commission was confidential, or ministerial; and according as the general rule and nature of the service require a prompt and precise obedience to orders, or not.

Under this head, also, fall the duties of servitude strictly so called. Service ought to be voluntary, and by contract; and the master's authority extends no further than the terms of the contract will justify. A servant is not bound to obey the unlawful commands of his master; to minister, for instance, to his unlawful pleasures; or to assist him in unlawful practices in his profession—as in smuggling, or adulterating the articles which he deals in. For the same reason, the master's authority is no justification of the servant in doing wrong. In all other respects, however, servants are bound to render the most entire, prompt, and faithful obedi-

ence. In all points, the interest of their employers should be made their own; and their whole service be rendered in a spirit of respectful submission and cheerful good-will. "Servants, be obedient to your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good-will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free" (Eph. vi. 3-8).

We have said that service ought to be voluntary. It necessarily follows that, in our judgment, there ought to be no slaves. The modern traffic in slaves cannot be too severely reprobated; but the question remains, Can any cause justify slavery? Without hesitation we answer, none. Slavery, indeed, was a part of the civil constitution of most countries when Christianity appeared; yet no passage is to be found in the Christian Scriptures by which it is condemned or prohibited. This is true: for Christianity, soliciting admission into all nations of the world, abstained, as behoved it, from intermeddling with the civil institutions of any. But does it follow from the silence of Scripture concerning them that all the civil institutions which then prevailed were right? or that the bad should not be exchanged for better? Besides this, the discharging of slaves from all obligation to obey their masters, which would have been the consequence of pronouncing slavery to be unlawful, would have had no other effect than to let loose one-half of mankind upon the other. Slaves would have been tempted to embrace a religion which asserted their right to freedom; masters would hardly have been persuaded to consent to claims founded upon such authority: the most calamitous of all contests, a *bellum servile*, might probably have ensued, to the reproach, if not the extinction, of the Christian name. The truth is, the emancipation of slaves should be gradual, and be carried on by provisions of law, and under the protection of civil government. Christianity can only operate as an alternative. By the mild diffusion of its light and influence, the minds of men are insensibly prepared to perceive and correct the enormities which folly, or wickedness, or accident, have introduced into their public establishments. In this way the

Greek and Roman slavery, and since these the feudal tyranny, have declined before it. And we trust that, as the knowledge of religion advances in the world, it will banish what remains of this odious institution.

Where servants are slaves, however, it should not be forgotten that slave-masters have duties; for towards slaves were all the duties to be exercised which are enjoined on masters in the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament, and surely with no slight solemnity. (See Ephesians vi. 9.) The duties of masters to their servants may be referred either to their conduct, their employment, or their treatment. A master of a family is culpable if he permit any vices among his domestics which he might restrain by due discipline, and a proper interference. Care to maintain in his family a sense of virtue and religion received the divine approbation in the person of Abraham (Gen. xviii. 19). "I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." And, indeed, no authority seems so well adapted to this purpose as that of masters of families, because none operates upon the subjects of it with an influence so immediate and constant. The occupation of servants should agree with the contract. Clerks and apprentices ought to be employed entirely in the profession or trade which they are intended to learn. Instruction is their wages; and to deprive them of the opportunities of instruction, by taking up their time with occupations foreign to their business, is to defraud them of their wages. And, as to their treatment, whatever uneasiness we occasion to our domestics which neither promotes our service, nor answers the just ends of punishment, is manifestly wrong. By which rule we are forbidden,—1. To enjoin unnecessary labour or confinement from the mere love and wantonness of domination. 2. To insult them by harsh, scornful, or opprobrious language. 3. To refuse them any harmless pleasures. And by the same principle are also forbidden causeless or immoderate anger, habitual peevishness, and groundless suspicion.

* * The duties relating to *Government* are treated under the article **POLITICAL ECONOMY.**

ON COMPLETENESS
OF
MINISTERIAL QUALIFICATION.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT CARTER LANE CHAPEL, DOCTORS' COMMONS,
LONDON, IN JUNE, 1826,

BEFORE THE FRIENDS OF THE

Stepney Academical Institution.

PREFACE.

THE following pages present to the reader a Sermon preached in London in June, 1826, before the friends of the Stepney Academical Institution. A discourse from the same text also, but far from being identical, was delivered in the following year at the anniversary of the Baptist Academy at Bradford, in Yorkshire. On both these occasions the author was immediately and warmly solicited to print his sermon; a proceeding which he declined, not through any want of respect to his friends, nor, as he trusts, through any unwillingness to do good; but because he considered such entreaties in general as originating more in momentary excitement or in personal partiality, than in a sound judgment of what is really wise or likely to be useful. With these refusals he had abandoned entirely the idea of publication; nor would he ever have resumed it, had it not again been pressed upon him, two years after the first delivery of the discourse, in a tone of seriousness which he did not know how to resist. Whether he has done right in yielding to this importunity he still doubts; but, as he trusts his only desire has been to contribute his mite towards public usefulness, so he commends his slender effort to the candour of his brethren cheerfully, and humbly to the blessing of his Lord.

Of the importance of the subject he is deeply convinced, and most happy would he be to attain the object of his wishes in the discussion of it; but he feels not a little painfully his own want of qualification for the task he has undertaken, and is far from being satisfied with the manner in which he has executed it. If the discourse may be of any utility, it can be only to furnish hints for more extended reflection, and a clue to the method of practical improvement. Its brevity denies it every other advantage; but, in order that this may be the more readily attained, it is pub-

lished in a form adapted to render it not only suitable for the library, but available as a pocket-companion.

The more seriously the author contemplates the topics enforced in the following pages, the more strongly he is impressed with their importance. Of neither of them can he be content to speak in terms even of comparative depreciation; but, if there is one on which he feels more profoundly than another, it is the manner in which the testimony of God is represented to mankind. No statements are more common among preachers of the evangelical body than those to which he has alluded; viz., that man is *unable* to be, or to do, good; and that Christ died for the elect *only*. The writer is quite aware of the multitude of feelings which the mention of these sentiments will awaken, partly in defence of long-established notions, partly in hostility to alleged novelties, and partly in pity for the man who is rash enough to encounter such a host of antagonistic prejudices; but a sense of momentous truth and of public duty constrains him to make an explicit avowal of his belief, that both these assertions are unscriptural and untrue. He may add, that, in his opinion, they are immeasurably mischievous. He is far from supposing that the excellent and devoted men who maintain these tenets have failed to satisfy themselves of their truth and excellency; but, if any of them should be willing to examine them afresh (an exercise which will at least do no harm), he would suggest to them two modes of bringing them to the test. In the first place, let them try whether, while they maintain man's *inability*, they can show any rational ground for asserting his *responsibility*; and whether, if they affirm that Christ died *only* for the elect, they can see any sincerity or good faith in *universal* invitations. Let it not be deemed sufficient to repel the implied objections with a high hand, as suggestions of the devil, or emanations from an unsanctified heart; much more likely as it is that it should both arise from the one, and prove gratifying to the other, for the very teachers of religion to inculcate what really invalidates the proclamation of God, and destroys the accountableness of man. The author is fully convinced that, upon the hypothesis in question, neither divine invitations nor human responsibility can stand; nor has he ever seen anything like an effective defence of them on this ground. The argument is simply this: *What a man*

cannot do he cannot justly be required to do; nor, for not doing it, can he be justly punished. Many an attack has been made upon this position, but it has never been assailed with success. It is, in fact, impregnable: and the author must be allowed to say, that nothing but accidental and circumstantial impediments can prevent any man of common sense and common honesty from admitting that, if man be responsible, he is, and must be, *fully able* to perform everything required of him. And, if this be the case, how is it possible to maintain the doctrine of human inability?

The responsibility of man stands high among the primary truths of religion; none being antecedent to it but the authority of God, and even this being not more important. Fail of establishing the just responsibility of man, and you cannot show that God has any righteous authority, or that man has any real criminality; that divine justice has any cause to complain, or mercy any occasion to interpose. Nay, the very contrary of all this may be proved; and it is undeniable that, if, under such circumstances, men are really held guilty and punished, it is nothing less than a violent and arbitrary wrong.

The other part of the argument is equally simple. *To that which is not prepared for a man's acceptance it is not a matter of sincerity and good faith to invite him;* nor could any attempt be made to justify a proceeding of this nature, but by means of disingenuous and hypocritical subterfuges, which would render it yet more odious. Such a method it is altogether impossible to ascribe to the ever-blessed God. If his invitations are universal, so must be his provision of mercy. And if so, the idea that Christ died only for the elect falls to the ground. He died for the whole world, and for every man; a sentiment in the enunciation of which faithfulness to God will allow the writer neither hesitation nor disguise. Abandon it, and you must either cease to preach what is more emphatically the Gospel altogether, or continue to do so with a consciousness that the Most High is acting a part which, if any man were to imitate it, you would execrate and despise in him.

This, then, is the first method of ascertaining the value of the views under consideration; namely, trying their consistency with fundamental and unquestionable truths. But there is another, and perhaps a more efficacious one. Let

any person who holds the inability of man and the limited aspect of Christ's death engage in conversation with an unbeliever of acute and well-disciplined mind. He ought to be in possession of means adapted and sufficient to instruct and convince such a man; and, if he is in possession of the truth, he will be so. But what will be the character of the discussion? The friend of God, instead of being able to bear on the conscience of his enemy, or even to throw any light into his understanding, will be attacked and driven to his entrenchments; the whole opportunity of usefulness will be spent in an embarrassed attempt to keep possession of the weapons before which his antagonist ought to have fallen; and it will be well if he comes off without a manifest, as well as a real, defeat. The consolatory reflection, indeed, is at hand—What an enmity does the carnal mind show to the truth! when the more appropriate language would be, How unskilful have I been in using the weapons of my warfare! For the result is not such as can arise in reference to the *truth*. Wicked men may *hate* it, but they can not *disprove* it: and, if the truth were fairly exhibited, the enemies of the Gospel would depart from the discussion embarrassed and confounded, instead of its friends. Let it not be said that the trial proposed is an unfair one. It is, on the contrary, the only fair trial to which the advocate of Christianity can be put. The truth itself is adapted and sufficient both to enlighten and to convince; and the more penetrating the mind is to which it appeals, the greater is its advantage. It is also a further benefit that the person addressed should have liberty of reply, because it discovers the points at which he most needs the force of truth to be applied. To attempt the instruction and conviction of persons who cannot answer, as is the case in discourses from the pulpit, is indeed a far easier thing; because, in such circumstances, statements which are merely plausible pass for truths, and even those which are not so cannot be exposed. So situated, a man is not under any necessity of being either accurate in his premises, or conclusive in his argumentation. The only way to make a real trial of his skill is to meet an adversary in single combat; if he has the right armour, and is able to use it, he cannot but conquer. Nor ought any minister to be content without arriving at this point. That which will not satisfy a man in the parlour will not convince him from the

pulpit, and that which fails to enlighten one cannot be relied upon for the instruction of others. But, if a minister of the Gospel be unable to instruct the ignorant, to convict the obdurate, and to silence the gainsayer, it is a very serious and even a melancholy thing. How large a part is this of his office! These are the first persons he has to address; these are the first objects he has to accomplish; it is only on the supposition of these things having been achieved that there can be inquirers to direct, or mourners to comfort, or saints to edify. And yet for these things he is incompetent! He holds opinions which prevent him from making any intelligent appeal to the conscience of a sinner; a shrewd unbeliever may see that all his addresses are sophistical and fallacious; and he suffers all such hearers to depart in the undisturbed repetition of the objections constantly felt, and fatally acted upon, by millions who know nothing of metaphysics:—"He says himself that I cannot repent, and that, if I am not one of the elect, there is no mercy for me!"

Let the representative of his Maker try the conflict with the weapons now recommended to him. Let him maintain (if he can with satisfaction to himself) *that every man possesses a full and entire ability to be and to do all that is right, and that the provision of divine mercy is unlimited and universal*, and he will soon perceive that the unbeliever is stripped of the armour wherein he trusted, and silenced, if not convicted and condemned.

The author is not ignorant that the sentiments he has been advocating have extensive connexions with other parts of Gospel truth, in reference to which some explanations might appear necessary in order to prevent the misinterpretation of his general views; but, as the introduction to a sermon is not the place for protracted discussion (he has need already to apologize), he hopes he may be permitted to refer for such amplification to a small work which is already before the public, and in which his views are fully exhibited.* With respect to the appeal to the Sacred Scriptures which might be urged upon him by some readers, he has only to remind them of the notorious fact, that all parties consider themselves as explaining satisfactorily the whole Bible, and

* Theology, or an Attempt towards a consistent View of the Whole Counsel of God. Vol. I. of this Edition.

that the interpretation of single passages is decided by the general doctrines previously embraced. To discuss general principles, therefore, is the only way to affect particular interpretations. When a sentiment proposed for adoption is clearly understood, it remains to try it by the whole Bible; and, if the reader will take this trouble with those now submitted to his notice, the desire of the writer will be fully attained.

2 TIMOTHY III. 17.

“THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE PERFECT, THOROUGHLY FURNISHED TO EVERY GOOD WORK.”

To be perfect, in its widest sense, is the prerogative of God alone; and it is one of the most exalted he possesses. To be perfect, in a sense corresponding with their nature and capability, is the brightest excellence of creatures; and, amidst whatever deficiencies, it should be the aim of all.

In the passage before us, however, the apostle appears to contemplate official rather than moral perfection; not an exact correspondence with the rule of universal rectitude, but a complete qualification for the work of the ministry. For, though there is a sense in which every Christian may be said to be a “man of God,” the phrase appears to be strictly applied by the New Testament writers to ministers of the Gospel; a use in which it is clearly still more appropriate, and for which it was obviously prepared by its employment, in preceding ages, to designate those who held the prophetic office. We are thus at once introduced, therefore, to a subject in exact agreement with the design of the present service; COMPLETENESS OF MINISTERIAL QUALIFICATION. Let us contemplate, in the first place, the general reasons why it should be desired; and, in the second, the particulars in which it consists.

I. In considering the general reasons why completeness of ministerial qualification should be desired, let it be observed in the outset, that upon the previous question, whether the ministerial office requires any qualification at all, we do not mean to enter; not, however, because it is unimportant in itself, or because the consideration of it is superseded by a universal agreement. To the cause of true religion a duly qualified ministry is a point of vital interest; and it is among the most melancholy reflections that men can yet be found to defend the existence of a mere professional clergy, a fearful abuse which so many causes conspire to perpetuate. But

the discussion of this topic is not necessary *here*, among persons whose desire to prevent such an evil is a leading characteristic of their religious profession, and their more especial attraction to the present assembly.

Our subject now is COMPLETENESS of ministerial qualification; a fitness for that great work neither defective in its parts, nor inferior in its degree. This is obviously distinct from the more general question. A person may possess a measure of fitness for the ministry, without eminence; he may possess some desirable qualities, but not all. Not that we are disposed to speak harshly of men of inferior attainments. We have all of us too many imperfections to permit us to be censorious of the least eminent of our brethren, and there is too much reason to bless God for the usefulness he affords to all to allow us to represent the meanest instrument as useless. But eminence in ministerial qualification is nevertheless desirable. An ardent longing for it breathes in the language of the apostle, and there are reasons of no small weight which should inspire us with a kindred feeling.

1. Every office, unless it be a sinecure, which the Christian ministry certainly is not in itself, and in no instance ought actually to be, suggests at least some duty to be discharged, some end to be attained: and nothing can be more obvious, than that the person who fills it should be qualified to attain the one, and to discharge the other. The importance of such qualification exactly corresponds with that of the office itself; nor can there be a moment's hesitation in saying, that, of all offices which can be occupied by man, it is unspeakably most momentous in the ministry of the Gospel. Everything which concerns the welfare of our species is important in its measure. Employments which respect their health, their education, their comfort,—all these require corresponding qualifications; but the Christian ministry much more than all, since it has respect to concerns of infinitely greater moment. It proposes the happiness of man in its noblest aspect: the welfare, not of the body merely, but of the soul; not only of time, but of eternity. It contemplates the wretchedness of man in its darkest shades: not only in the languishing and pains of the mortal frame, but in the corruption and perdition of the immortal spirit; not only as poor in this world, but as destitute of a portion for that which is to come; not only as the mortal victim of the king

of terrors, but as subject to a second and eternal death. In a word, it regards him as, before God, both criminal and depraved; the one giving birth within the heart to the worm which never dies, and the other kindling without the fire that is never quenched.

Nor are they only human interests that are connected with the ministry of the Gospel. It confides to us also, to speak with reverence, the interests of God. He condescends to employ us in his administration. He "hath appeared in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses." He has exhibited himself and his ways in an aspect adapted to subdue the enmity of mankind: and, having so done, he renders his ministers the active instruments in the work of reconciliation. We cannot hesitate to apply to them in every age the words of the apostle: "We are ambassadors for Christ: as though God did beseech by us, we pray men in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God." Commissioned by him to represent to a guilty world all that he has declared in his Gospel, and, by the most cogent arguments and the most affectionate methods, to persuade men to accept his friendship, it is to us that his interest in this respect is committed. He employs no other living instrumentality. He leaves the work in our hands, and what we do will be all that is done for its progress.

With any impressive view of these things, the thought of entering unqualified on such a work is most awful. Who would profess to guide his wretched fellow-creatures to everlasting joy without *some* fitness for the task? Who would pretend to conduct them to deliverance from impending woes without *some* knowledge of the way of escape? Who would exhibit himself as the representative of the Divine Majesty without understanding the attitude he assumes, and in *some* measure imbibing the spirit of his ways? What calamity, nay, what crime, is not to be preferred to that of assuming the office of God's representative only to betray the interests of his kingdom; and that of man's guide to happiness only to beguile him into endless perdition?

But, if these are powerful reasons why no man should engage in the ministry wholly unqualified, they urge us with equal force in the pursuit of qualifications eminent and complete. If he who is altogether unfit for the work cannot rightly discharge any of its duties, he who is incompletely

furnished can discharge them but imperfectly. There ought to be no duty in the performance of which imperfection is tolerated by us; but least of all should those of the Christian ministry be of that number. O! how much may depend on every breath when we speak for God! How will the heart need to be inspired with the highest wisdom, and to be animated by the holiest dispositions, which is employed in connexion with such awful issues! Or with what degree of incorrectness are we then willing to represent the Most High to mankind? By how far defective results are we content that our embassy should be followed? With what measure of inefficacy do we wish to occupy the post of instrumental benefactors of our kind? Whom do we wish to sink into hell beneath our care, or to fall short of heaven? If none, then why are we negligent of any qualification for our ministry? Why content with ordinary or moderate attainments? Why in peace with our known deficiencies, or employing otherwise than with the most fervent diligence our opportunities of improvement?

2. If one class of reasons for desiring completeness of ministerial furniture may be derived from the magnitude of the interests involved, another may be drawn from the multiplicity and variety of the duties to be performed. For some offices one quality may constitute a sufficient adaptation; the Christian ministry, however, requires not one, but many; for it has many duties to be performed, and many subordinate ends to be attained.

It is necessary to preach the Gospel: but this, though a prominent and a principal part, is far from being the whole of ministerial duty. It is not less needful to pursue the edification of the flock in private intercourse; and, in addition to this, it is required to conduct the concerns of the associate body. Each of these departments is again divided. Preaching should comprise both instruction and persuasion; persuasion, too, by the most varied methods, both of terror and of love: and combined with these in their countless forms, the exhibition of warning and consolation, of encouragement and rebuke. Private intercourse should comprehend the administration of counsel, suited, not to one or to a few, but to all the cases of individual character, and the occurrences of ordinary life; together with the specific exercises adapted to the instruction of the young, the direc-

tion of inquirers, and the visitation of the afflicted. While the conduct of church-affairs, with aspects ever varying, cannot but require always wisdom, and, at different seasons, the exercise of most remote and dissimilar dispositions.

It is not to be supposed that such an office can be easily filled. It demands not merely some, but many—nay, all excellencies, in happy combination. A person may, in a general way, be said to be qualified for the ministry, who has talents for preaching, though not fitted for profitable private intercourse, or the affairs of church government. But this is evidently not a complete adaptation to the work. It is, on the contrary, a very imperfect one, and one with which no man should be content. For all the aspects of ministerial labour are, if not equally, yet highly important; every one of them far too important to be trifled with. The right performance of each affords facilities to the rest, and gives additional beauty and efficacy to all. To be fit for only one department cannot but greatly impede our activity, and diminish our success. To fill the ministerial office with a degree of satisfaction or benefit commensurate with its capabilities, or with the desire of a heart awake to its importance, we must be all that it demands: fit for the pulpit, fit for the parlour, fit for the church-meeting; in short, as men of God, “perfect, completely furnished to every good work.”

3. Eminence in ministerial qualification should be the more ardently sought, because the office is to be discharged in the midst of very serious difficulties. Many arise from within the heart, because the work requires much sustained exertion and self-denial. It is adapted, indeed, to yield abundant pleasure to men of ardent devotedness, but to none other; and even these have found the corruption of their nature present no small impediments to their zeal. Other difficulties arise from without; for a minister has to do with a great diversity of character. He will meet with the deceitfulness and wickedness of the heart in ten thousand forms, and will find cases which require all his wisdom, all his gentleness, and all his fortitude; besides which, some parts of his work are likely to be by no means acceptable, whether in the exercise of public or of private instruction.

Now every degree in which qualification is defective will prove an aggravation of these difficulties. A man of the most

ample fitness will discover that he has no unnecessary preparation, even if all he possesses should be sufficient for the successful discharge of his duty; while any other man will be liable to find himself continually in circumstances to which he is not adequate; circumstances in which he knows not what to do, or, knowing, is not able to effect it. He may be obliged to retire from scenes of usefulness because he is not competent to occupy them; and to endure evils because he is not qualified to cure them, if not because his inaptness has engendered them. Be fitted to labour, therefore, in all departments of your office, so that each shall bear the marks of a vigorous and skilful agency, and, in defiance of obstructions, yield an ample recompense for your toil. To be only so far prepared for your work that its difficulties shall baffle and defeat you, for the general cause will be no better than if you had never been engaged in it, while bitter disappointment will make it far more mortifying to yourselves.

II. Having thus stated to you some of the general reasons which should render ministerial completeness an object of ardent desire, let us proceed, in the second place, to specify the particulars which it comprehends.

1. In this department of our subject, we must of necessity refer, in the first place, to experimental piety. This is the first of requisites, without which it is impossible that an engagement in the ministry can be otherwise than both mischievous and sinful. But we speak not now of the mere existence of piety; the completeness intended requires that it should be eminent. Accordingly, in another place the apostle says that a bishop, or pastor, should be "not a novice," or a person recently converted; a direction obviously grounded on the probability of slender and unstable piety. On the same principle it may be extended much further; for, as young converts do not necessarily, so neither do they alone, exhibit a want of depth and stability in religious character, or come, therefore, within the legitimate scope of this prohibition.

The work of the ministry requires knowledge which can be acquired in no school but that of experience. It demands exertions which ought in all cases to spring from heavenly principles, and which can be adequately sustained by no other. It calls for the constant exercise of dispositions

which can be formed and cherished by divine influence alone. It summons to a situation of publicity in which every defect appears with tenfold magnitude, and produces a hundredfold mischief. A person of feeble piety in the work of the ministry is like a child in the avocations of manhood; possessing powers of the right kind, indeed, but not of sufficient maturity; and wasting them in unsteady and fruitless toil, while they ought to have been cherished and strengthened for future exertion.

But, lest the language we hold should appear vague, let us mark more particularly the features by which the piety of a minister should be decisively characterized.

And we mention, first, a deep realization of the fundamental truths of religion; a point on which the force of its experimental character as truly depends, as the strength of a building on the solidity of its foundation, or the vigour of a tree on the firmness of its root. We mean to urge the necessity of a vivid perception of eternal things, and a commanding impression of their magnitude and importance; a profound conviction of the inestimable value of the soul; a clear apprehension of the moral government of God, in its nature, authority, justice, and excellency; a deeply-humbling sense of awful criminality, and just condemnation; and an entire unison of spirit with the Most High, as maintaining and honouring his moral government by the work of his Son, and by the whole administration of his grace. There are probably many apparent, and perhaps real, converts, into whose piety these features very slightly enter. In one of this class, however, the basis of Christian experience, if laid at all, is laid very defectively. His religious character contains elements of feebleness and inconsistency. The avenues of backsliding are open and unobstructed. He is just prepared to be an ineffective and unstable professor, and ultimately to embrace erroneous doctrine, tending either to licentiousness on the one hand or to self-righteousness on the other. It is matter of regret when such a man takes up a profession of religion, but it is much more to be lamented that he should enter into the ministry.

The piety of a minister should be further characterized by a deep-rooted and steadfast love to Christ; for his work will require no small portion of such a spirit, to animate its duties and to sweeten its toils. And yet we know that even

sincere piety is not always connected with eminence in this grace. Too often we behold in professors a spirit of worldly pursuit and self-indulgence, or at best a comparatively feeble and inoperative love. Such persons are scarcely equal to the most ordinary path in life; least of all are they fit for the ministry of the Gospel. Everywhere they would be almost useless, but here pre-eminently so: slumbering when they should be awake; turning aside to diversion when they should be devoted to their labour; losing opportunities for want of promptness in embracing them; and missing all the pleasures of their work, while perpetually complaining of its privations. O, no! enter not into the ministry unless your heart is wholly devoted to Christ; unless you have learned to value nothing in comparison with his glory; unless, by his cross, the world is crucified to you, and you unto the world.

The piety of a minister should be characterized, also, by an habitual spirit of devotion. It is thus that the exercise of graces will be maintained, and the soul refreshed after the exhaustion of daily duties; it is thus that the encroachments of a worldly and self-indulgent spirit will be prevented, or repelled; it is thus that the heart will be kept ready for duty in its stated or unexpected recurrences, and be prepared to discharge it at all times in the true spirit of the ministry. Destitute of such a temper, we shall be like persons, not perhaps dead, but in a lethargy; having valuable qualifications, we shall be as though we had none, or we shall exert them in a manner little adapted to fulfil their design. Yet all Christians are not men of much prayer. A neglect of this great duty and unspeakable privilege is, perhaps, one of the prevailing sins of the age. It is one by which the general profession of religion is greatly injured, but one which no man is so powerfully urged to renounce as a minister of the Gospel.

Finally, the piety of a minister should be characterized by an exemplary exhibition of Christian graces. His example is inevitably held up, both to the church and to the world, and will be regarded as an illustration of the doctrines he teaches. To preach the Gospel and not to live the Gospel, is the surest way to make our labours of none effect; and at the same time to encourage professors in their inconsistency, and the profane in their wickedness. Nothing gives more

beauty and efficacy to the office of the minister, than a life highly adorned by the graces of the Christian. There are Christians, however, with great and glaring infirmities; good men of austere dispositions, of ill-regulated temper, of vehement passions, of imprudent lips—and far would we be from harshly censuring what, we trust, none so severely condemn as themselves: but such men are not complete in ministerial furniture, unless divine grace has operated to the remedy of these evils. Nor can any man be so, until Christian graces and character are brought to a degree of consistency and stability which render him eminently fit to be exhibited as a light of the world.

2. Among qualifications for the ministry, we advert, secondly, to the knowledge of divine truth. It is manifest that he who does not understand Christianity cannot teach it, and ought not to try; but neither ought any man to make the attempt whose view of it is contracted and superficial. We know, indeed, that the substance of the Gospel is comprehended in a few simple ideas, which may be sufficient for the production and support of sincere piety, and that there are many persons in whose religion little more of knowledge is contained: but this is not desirable even for them, since the power and the happiness of religion are always proportionate to the degree of sanctified knowledge; and with respect to those who have to instruct others, a much more ample acquaintance with divine truth is undeniably necessary. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;" and it is given for this end, "that the man of God may be perfect, completely furnished to every good work."

Our views of divine things should be both accurate and comprehensive; including all the truths which God has revealed, both as they are in themselves, and in relation to each other. It can be only in proportion to such an acquaintance with his will that we are likely to speak of God the thing that is right, and either to declare his whole counsel to mankind, or to present any part of it in its just aspect and bearings; and it is only in proportion as this is done that the effects of our preaching, whether general or individual, can correspond with the declared design or the real tendencies of the Gospel. In one word, a minister's know-

ledge of divinity should be systematic. Not that we are disposed to recommend an arrangement of ourselves under the banner of any celebrated theologian, or the actual adoption of any human scheme of theology; nor that we are ignorant of the very unsystematic form in which truth is communicated to us in the sacred writings: but divine truth is nevertheless a system; and necessarily so, inasmuch as it is a system of facts to which it refers. It is in a system of operations that God is engaged, and the declarations which represent it must form a system of truth. Nor, with all the want of method which appears in his communications, are we prepared to admit that he has imparted truth in a manner so defective, as to deny the necessary facilities for discovering its connexions and arranging its parts.

And if divine truth be a system, it is one which every man who wishes to understand it should endeavour to discern. Availing himself of the labours of others, but not confining himself to their opinions, every minister should explore and arrange the sacred records for himself. We are perfectly aware of its difficulty. We know that it is far easier to sit down content with a few general and acknowledged tenets, without attempting to investigate the more profound and intricate points; or to range ourselves in a certain class of divines, without any concern to appreciate the real value of their views. It will result from this, however, that we shall often be uncertain whether we speak according to truth, if even we can maintain consistency with ourselves; a method which will be little to the honour of the teacher, and as little to the edification of his charge.

Among the comparatively difficult subjects which no minister should satisfy himself without mastering (but merely as a specimen of them), we may mention the real nature of moral agency and responsibility to God, especially as connected with the depraved state and alleged inability of man; the conjunction of the special favour shown to the elect with a dispensation of universal mercy to mankind; and the twofold aspect and operation of the death of Christ on these different classes. In other words, he should know *why* the dead sinner, whom he exhorts, is summoned to spiritual action; and *on what ground* the non-elect sinners, whom he indefinitely invites, may expect a welcome from redeeming love.

We readily acknowledge that there is a limit beyond which our inquiries cannot be carried, and that there are mysterious points of which the investigation should not be attempted. But we are not pleading for this. We wish to know nothing more than is revealed, and intended to be known; but of none of these things are we willing or required to be ignorant. It is further most certain that among revealed truths there can be no contradictions, for contradictions cannot be truths. Yet a man who speaks without system will almost infallibly both adopt contradictions, and utter them.

It is necessary that a minister should know the deep things of God, not merely that his general instructions may be consistent with truth and with themselves, but because it is a part of his duty to teach these very things to his people. Not that we would have abstruse speculations introduced into the pulpit; but we know no reason why a congregation should be prohibited from acquiring judicious views. It is not a mode of preaching of which we can express any approbation, to evade the difficult and intricate points of theology, and to treat our hearers with a string of common-place superficialities, rather than with discourses which may lead them to think, and teach them to think aright; and still less could we commend the spirit which would lead a minister to suppress what he conceived to be the truth of God, lest he should violate an established phraseology (in all probability the fence, too long held sacred, of pernicious sentiments), and so startle the ears or arouse the prejudices of his people. Why are men, when exhorted, not to have it explained to them how rational it is that they, who can do nothing, should be called upon to do everything? Why, when universal invitations are addressed to sinners, is it not to be fairly shown on what principles of truth and sincerity they are proclaimed?

It cannot be said with truth that our hearers could not enter into such discussions as those to which we have alluded. Were not the discourses of Charnock and Owen addressed to pulpit audiences? If our congregations are incapable of mental effort, it is probably because they are unaccustomed to it; and we have only to say that it is quite time they were better trained. It is certain that a clear understanding of the points adverted to involves the general accuracy and influence of religious sentiment, and that a misconception of

them lies at the foundation of some of the most extensive and pernicious errors of the day. It is certain, too, that, if men cannot understand the reasons which may be adduced to show them that their depravity does not release them from obligation, they readily apprehend arguments of an opposite tendency; and that, if they would find it too abstruse to inquire what grounds are laid for the welcome of every sinner to divine mercy, they can easily entertain the supposed proofs of the contrary. It is because these opinions make it a matter of total indifference to them whether they live in their sins or forsake them. To waive such points is, therefore, in fact, to confirm some of the most glaring and mischievous misrepresentations of the Gospel, to abandon the heart to its wickedness, and to secure to the devil his triumph.

We must be allowed to add, that we are scarcely prepared to believe that the presumed unsuitableness of such topics to mixed congregations has extensively operated to their exclusion. A man who has clear views of these things will be very apt to speak of them. If it should be true that a minister feels himself unable to speak satisfactorily on the intricate points of divinity, this would form a much more obvious and natural reason for avoiding them.

3. To these qualifications for the ministry must be added an aptitude to communicate instruction; since instruction is one of its great ends, and since the knowledge possessed by one person can be made available to the benefit of others only in proportion as it is suitably imparted. A large measure of this aptitude pertains to ministerial completeness.

Some of the requisites to this qualification are the gift of nature, and, in the selection of ministerial candidates, these ought not to be overlooked; but others of them, and by far the most important, by effort and cultivation may be greatly increased, if not wholly acquired. Such are the habits of clear and comprehensive thinking, of lucid arrangement, of effective expression, and of appropriate illustration. Without the former of these a man's knowledge cannot be of much use to himself, but a defect in any of them will impair its value to others. We cannot distinctly convey what we do not clearly apprehend; nor can we expect our ideas to be readily received, if we exhibit them in a confused method, in feeble phraseology, or in an obscure and unattractive style.

Add to these the power of persuasion ; the art of turning all that may be advanced to this main, we may say, to this only end of religious instruction. For divine truth is not a matter of mere science. Like the sun, it is adapted to quicken as well as to enlighten the world. It touches the operative springs of our nature, and inspires the whole man with activity; and it is never presented as it ought to be when this object is lost sight of. It is for us, not merely to announce the Gospel to our hearers, but to urge it on their acceptance ; not only to instruct, but to persuade men. He that can demonstrate with the utmost clearness all the truths of the system, is yet sadly incomplete in his qualification for the ministry if his lips are unskilled in the methods of heavenly persuasion.

With these may be connected the art of speaking ; by which, however, we are far from intending an artificial mode of address. We mean rather the power of speaking so as to facilitate instruction, and more especially, the very difficult art of preventing or curing the unnatural and unpleasant intonations, and the various other improprieties, by which dissenting ministers, above all other professional speakers, are unhappily characterized. Not that divine truth is at all less important when connected with such imperfections, nor would we say that they render it less agreeable ; but they create obstacles to its reception, and these of the most unnecessary and ungracious kind. Bad speaking is disagreeable in itself, and, in the mind of the hearer, is very apt to associate its own unpleasing qualities with the subject on which it has been employed ; or if not so, it pre-occupies the mind in a manner which leaves by no means a fair opportunity for receiving the import, or attending to the claims, of truth. If bad speakers can make a strong impression, it is either by the influence of a mighty mind, which few individuals possess, or by the mere force of truth, which operates in defiance of all impediments ; but, if men of more ordinary talents would be effective in the pulpit, or if any man would give to the truth he utters the whole impressiveness of its nature, he must speak well. And he speaks best who leaves you quite at a loss, when you have heard him, to know how he delivered himself. To fill our hearers with thoughts of the good qualities of our address, is as great, and almost as mischievous, a fault as to offend them by its impropriety. Both tend to

make the speaker supersede his subject. Elocution has no importance but as the vehicle of thought and feeling; and its perfection lies exclusively in the fidelity and power with which it accomplishes this end. The medium through which truth is presented to the mind should be, like the lens, perfectly transparent; concealed, and even forgotten, amidst the beauties it has transmitted; as the vessel which conveys the water of life to a thirsty soul should be neither repulsive by its impurity, nor by its beauty adapted to beguile him of the all-important draught.

Ability for communicating instruction should correspond with the diversified objects and occasions of the ministry. We should be able to convince, to warn, to alarm, to direct, to encourage; and to do all these in exercises both public and private, domestic and social. For in all these things, and under all these circumstances, will demands be made upon a minister; nor ought he to be unprepared for any of them. If he would, as a man of God, "be perfect, completely furnished to every good work," he should be equally a Boanerges and a Barnabas; a son of thunder and a son of consolation; a guide of the fathers and a teacher of babes.

4. We must further place among important qualifications for the ministry, skilfulness in conducting the concerns of an associate body. Let us not be supposed, however, to refer to the temporal affairs of the churches: a species of business with which it is assuredly most desirable that ministers should have nothing to do; and it is happy when these are so adequately attended to that they have no inducement to interfere, and wisdom enough to decline the interference. It is upon the pastor, however, that the spiritual concerns of the society necessarily devolve, and not a little wisdom is required to conduct them successfully. Errors of very mischievous influence are easily committed, and with great uncertainty rectified. The difficulty of the case arises principally, if not wholly, from the connexion of the church as a body with the general business to be transacted. In many instances they are to be consulted, in all to be pleased. To determine wisely on what subjects it is not necessary specifically to ask their opinion; to know how to ask it with dignity, to gather it with fairness, to bow to it with grace, and to fulfil it with cheerfulness; to be able, while giving full play to the republican properties of the body, to main-

tain the unity and vigour of the executive; and either to excite, to regulate, or to quell, the movements of popular feeling;—all this is not easy. It requires some natural aptness, together with much of enlightened judgment, and well-regulated temper.

Different as this is from the study of divinity and the preaching of the Gospel, remote as it is from the general habits of early life, and still more remote from those of a theological student; all this the pastor of a church has to do immediately upon his entrance on the office: and an ample preparation for it is assuredly necessary to the completeness of his qualification. His personal tranquillity, the comfort of his intercourse with his people, the peace of the church, and the success of his ministry, all depend upon his wisdom; nor less the harmony, vigour, and effect, of all the measures of the society. If he is disposed to take no lead, church-affairs will probably fall into irregularity and confusion. If he expects to command, there will inevitably ensue irritation and disappointment, with the probable appendages of party contests and separations. If he acts indiscreetly, either withholding serious matters or perpetually consulting the church upon trifles; if he presses unacceptable measures, and does not yield to the popular will, or endeavours to carry favourite projects by unfair means; the whole church, sooner or later, will almost inevitably be embroiled.

He that seeks the pastoral office should learn the principles of our church constitution, and should especially observe how totally different it is from the system of ecclesiastical bondage and domination which prevails around him. Let him impress his mind with the fact, that our churches are assemblies of men as free, and as much attached to freedom, in the church as in the state, in religion as in politics. Not that they are without law, but their only lawgiver is Christ. He has appointed offices which they honour; but let every man that would occupy them remember, that, while the authority of the office is conferred by Christ, that of the individual is delegated by the people; that the authority even of the office is not without its limits, and that it ought always to be exercised in the spirit of the station. This it is of all things most important for a pastor to cherish. Before he becomes such let him be willing to be the servant of the people; to identify himself with their interest; to throw the

decision of all questions into their hands; and, as far as conscience will permit, to do with cheerfulness all they may desire. Let him learn, especially, to hold sacred the will of the body,—always ascertaining it fairly and maintaining it inflexibly,—as the only plan accordant with the congregational system and the scriptural rule, and as a method eminently adapted either to avoid or to conquer the possible difficulties of his situation. Let him be no stranger beforehand to the elements of popular assemblies, and the established principles of their government; and by the experience of others learn to diminish at least the severity of the lessons he will otherwise gather from his own.

5. Among qualifications for the ministry we enumerate, finally, an adaptation to general society. Not that a minister is to be a man of this world; but it is in this world, nevertheless, that he is to act, though under the influence of principles, and for the promotion of ends, intimately connected with another. Even with regard to his direct success it is material that he should be fit for society, since Christianity is not adapted exclusively to any portion of mankind, but is designed to spread through all ranks; as the luminary of heaven, with equal aspect, sheds its brightness on the peasant and the prince. Nor is it necessarily associated with anything unsuitable to society in any of its departments. It is equally congenial with the refinement of the palace and the rusticity of the cottage; still resembling the sunbeam, which, not at all dishonoured by its familiarity with the one, retains all its adaptation to the splendour of the other. And while the representative of Christianity passes from the one to the other, there is no need that he should carry with him anything incongruous with either. It is evident, however, that the sphere of his labours, and therefore the degree of his usefulness, will be materially affected by his fitness for intercourse with the several ranks of society. The fact of his being a minister does not confer the necessary adaptation. No man can be well received, nor can anything be well received from him, and least of all religious counsel, in company for which his habits and manners render him an incongruous guest. Unless, therefore, a minister would confine his labours within very narrow limits, he should fit himself for mingling with all classes. Let him not be, by any means, a man of repulsive manners,

or of recluse and anti-social habits. Let him not, on the one hand, be in such sense a gentleman as to fancy himself disgraced by the familiarity of the poor, or as to be incapable of rendering his intercourse with them both beneficial and agreeable; nor let him, on the other, be a man of vulgar habits or coarse conversation. He should be neither ignorant nor sheepish; that he may neither be causelessly afraid of the higher orders, nor have any reason to be ashamed when he is in their company. Where he is admitted in society he may be useful, but only there.

But this is not all. Christian churches are public bodies, and their pastors become in a measure public men. They may be often called upon to express their opinion in mixed assemblies, and have an opportunity of taking an active part in measures of general benefit. To a considerable extent, they are regarded as the representatives of the churches; they may have occasion to speak the sentiments of the respective societies, or even of the whole body of Dissenters, and no inconsiderable influence is put into their hands when they act, as they often may, at the head of their people. A minister who would be completely furnished to every good work, should be able to fill such a station, ready to feel an interest in all measures of public importance, and qualified to take a part in them; able to express his sentiments in a way, not adapted to the pulpit merely, but to the platform; a worthy representative of the body with whom, in general, he is identified; and fit to rank with the clergy, and other public men, of the place where he resides. Nor is this beyond hope. The necessary attainments of education, good manners, and general knowledge, are within the reach almost of every one who will endeavour to secure them; and, though considerable degrees of usefulness may be enjoyed without them, they will assuredly not be overlooked by any man who is desirous, as a man of God, to be perfect, or completely qualified for the station he fills.

If we have been so happy as to carry you with us in these observations, we are persuaded you will not be insensible to the appeals which we shall found upon them.

We address ourselves in the first place to those who contemplate, and may hereafter actually fill, the ministerial office. The question whether you shall enter the ministry is one respecting which your brethren do not claim any authority

over you, nor can any set of men rightfully do so. If you have a warrant to engage in this work, it must be derived from a higher source, even from above; this, if wanting, no human designation can compensate; if possessed, no human power can invalidate. It is, however, a question for your own most serious consideration whether you possess qualifications for the work. You would not, we trust, think of entering the ministry as a profession merely, irrespective of your adaptation to its duties. If you should have entertained such a thought, most earnestly would we beseech you to relinquish it; for, as the principle is most unholy, so will the result be most melancholy, both to others and to yourselves. At all events abandon the *dissenting* body, for *we* have nothing that can tempt your cupidity.

But we assure ourselves, rather, that you aspire after a fitness for the office you contemplate. We urge you, therefore, to seek after all the qualifications it requires, and after them all in the highest degree. As men of God, "be perfect, completely furnished to every good work." Make it a matter of serious inquiry, whether you possess in any adequate degree the requisite natural endowments. Institute a yet more deep and solemn examination whether your piety be, not merely sincere, but deeply founded and well established. If it be not so, you are but ill-prepared for the ministry: and this is a point on which you should be the more cautious, because desires after the ministry often characterize the earliest and most unsettled stage of the Christian life.

If you can satisfactorily advance thus far, let us urge upon you the pursuit of acquired aptitude in all its branches. Take a comprehensive view of the desirable qualifications. Especially beware of thinking that preaching is everything. It is a principal and a prominent part of your duty, standing more forward than others, and attracting an earlier and more pointed attention; but it is not everything. A man may be an admirable preacher, and yet, in some important respects, be lamentably unfit for the ministry, and more especially for the pastoral office. Apply yourselves to the less obvious and showy, but not at all less important, qualities, which will fit you for the parlour, the church, and the world.

Beware, too, of unduly cultivating powers already eminent. It is unquestionably very delightful to indulge ourselves in exercises for which we have by nature both a taste and a

talent; but, for the most part, it is among the least improving of all methods. In these respects we shall probably find sufficient ability for all valuable ends, with very moderate, even if not without any, application; while it is almost certain, that our eminence in one point will be found connected with no unimportant defects in others, which the seemingly innocent indulgence of a natural taste will tend to perpetuate, and to convert into aggravated and incurable faults. If you already excel in the pulpit, direct your attention to the requisites for excellence in the domestic circle. If you find yourself constitutionally adapted for private intercourse, beware lest you fail in preparation for public life. And yet more minutely, if your gift in preaching be the alarming, particularly cultivate the consolatory. In a word, be comparatively negligent of the good qualities you have, and bend your chief force to the acquisition of those you have not.

Let not these admonitions be repelled by saying, no man can be eminent in all things; such a combination of excellencies never falls to the lot of the same person. True as this is in reference to natural endowments, it affords not the shadow of justification for the *voluntary* neglect of any excellence. God may have given you talents particularly adapted to one department of the ministry; but there is no place where such talents can accomplish all the ends of the ministry. To enter on it with a view of selecting any of its branches, or, which is the same thing, of neglecting the rest, is a serious error. It should assuredly be taken as a whole; and while we anticipate with pleasure the successful exertion of the qualities in which we excel, we should cultivate with far greater assiduity those in which we are wanting. The adaptation which God has not given by nature he has afforded us many opportunities of acquiring, "that the man of God *may* be perfect;" and it is both mischievous and criminal to take an inferior aim. To say that you are eminent in some qualifications, is to say that in others you are defective. Indulge no complacency in the former as long as the latter is a truth.

Beware of the influence of popularity and general commendation. It expresses for the most part mere feeling, and not judgment; nor can it be relied upon as the voice of those who are able to judge. And if it could be thus re-

garded, all its import would be that you have some excellencies. Shall the knowledge of this satisfy you? You have not heard how many spoke of your faults; or, if others have not perceived them, they are matters to which you ought not to be blind. Turn from the applause of your hearers to the object of your ministry in its extent and glory; in comparison with this you will find that much is yet wanting, and we hope will reckon nothing done while anything remains to be achieved.

If this be your object, you will know how to value the opportunity of improvement. Prize it as an inestimable privilege. Never suffer yourselves to regard it with dislike or complaint, as an obstruction to your happiness. It is the unhappiest of all things to go into such a work unprepared. And let every moment of it be improved; do not trifle it away. Endeavour, while you are students, to form the germ of all that future life may require, ready to burst forth in vigour and fruitfulness whenever its season shall arrive; and you will hereafter know how much, by such a course, you consult both your usefulness and your happiness. It is not that we would render your present labours oppressive; we wish only to spare you painful experience, and bitter disappointment. Your present opportunities are such as will never recur; and, if it were otherwise, you will never find it so easy to acquire wisdom. The means of instruction are provided for you by persons who are deeply concerned for the cause which will be committed to your hands, and who may perhaps sit under your ministry. By being diligent show that you are grateful. Let them see that you aim at becoming all they can wish you to be. Exhibit to them practical proofs of the wisdom of the institution they patronize, and render it difficult, not to excite them to liberality, but to show cause for restraining it. Above all, make such an improvement of your present opportunities as shall afford you pleasing reflections in the day when they will be solemnly reviewed. So prepare yourselves for life as though your hearts were fixed on saying at its close, "I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain."

If we address ourselves, in the second place, to the conductors of education for the ministry, we desire to speak with the humility and respect which become us. We entertain, however, a firm persuasion of your concurrence in the

views which have now been stated. It is your desire and your aim to provide for the churches such men as we have described. We know somewhat of your difficulties, nor are we at all disposed to form a harsh judgment of the system of academical instruction; and yet it may, perhaps, be worth consideration, whether there are not branches of ministerial wisdom with which students are left in too great a measure unacquainted. We are confident that none are more painfully sensible of its imperfections than yourselves, or more desirous of removing them. In presenting to you this slender effort of affectionate co-operation, we give utterance to our ardent desire that your endeavours may be crowned with success.

We address ourselves, finally, to the whole body of professing Christians, and to all the friends of Christianity. We ask whether it is not your desire that the men of God should "be perfect, completely furnished to every good work"? Each of you wishes for such a minister. You are also convinced that the general cause of Christianity would be promoted by them. We call upon you, then, by all the love you have for the interest of the Redeemer, and by all the concern you feel for your own edification, to concur heartily in the endeavour to multiply them. For how are such ministers to be obtained? Nature and grace conspire to produce them, but these are not effectual alone. Super-added to these must be well-directed culture. You are well aware from what ranks of life many of your ministers are drawn; nor is it possible that even others can be thus perfect, without opportunity for study and improvement. We do not mean at present to contend with those who would have pastors of churches to be men of business, a system which appears to involve an equal destruction both of qualification and opportunity for the duties of the ministry; nor will we enter into the discussions which have arisen respecting the comparative advantages and disadvantages of our academies in general, or of this for which we are pleading in particular. We maintain only that, for the production of able ministers, opportunity for study is absolutely necessary; and, if it is your opinion that, by this institution, such opportunity is well afforded, and such improvement wisely provided for, it is an inconsistency into which we are persuaded you will not fall to withhold this day the only pledge of your sincerity.

THE MEANS
OF A
RELIGIOUS REVIVAL.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT HOSIERS' STREET CHAPEL, READING,
DECEMBER 14TH, 1828.

“AWAKE, AWAKE; PUT ON THY STRENGTH, O ZION!”—*Isaiah* lii. 1.

TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST ASSEMBLING IN HOSIERS'
STREET, READING.

MY BELOVED CHARGE:

THE discourse which I now put into your possession in a more permanent form than that in which the substance of it has already been delivered to you from the pulpit, I request you to accept as a token, both of sincere personal regard, and of an anxious concern for your spiritual welfare and the prosperity of religion around you. It is not, indeed, explanatory of the grand and all-important doctrines of grace, which are equally the basis of your hope and the leading theme of my ministry, without any allowed deviation from fidelity, though with much lamented imperfection: the subject of it is, nevertheless, of great importance, and more especially so in connexion with the interest which you have always felt, and have recently more decisively manifested, in the growing prevalence of true religion. I might still have contented myself, however, with the ordinary mode of addressing to you pastoral instruction, were it not that I have felt on the present occasion a deep conviction that a very considerable change requires to be wrought in our habits of life, and an unusual concern that it may be actually accomplished. Do not imagine that I form an unworthy estimate of your devotedness to God, or of your efforts for his cause; but, in comparison with the claims of that cause itself, I fear the whole church of Christ must be said to have been asleep. It greatly needs to be aroused. In such an attempt, it is my first duty to address myself immediately to you as my especial charge in the Lord; and I beseech you to suffer the word of exhortation. Nor only suffer it. Open your hearts to the admission and consideration of the truth. Read the following pages with a sincere and fervent prayer that the Lord will bless them to you, and

make them the means of showing you how far you fall short of a proportionate zeal. Not the character of the writer, but the unspeakable importance of the subject, urges me to request that you will read this discourse more than once. Read it often ; and always with desire and prayer that it may be instrumental in quickening your activity. Rest not, until your hearts are thoroughly pervaded by the sentiments which it breathes, nor until your exertions correspond with the directions which it contains. It is with the hope of attaining this end that I have determined to put it into your hands ; and in doing so, what fervent prayers do I not associate with the gift, that the Lord may count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ !

With unfeigned attachment and devotedness to your best interests, and lively gratitude for many proofs of your Christian regard, I am,

Beloved brethren,

Your affectionate pastor,

JOHN HOWARD HINTON.

READING, *December 24, 1848.*

PREFACE.

OBSERVING the annunciation that Wednesday, the 10th of December, would be set apart by the Baptist churches in London as a day of extraordinary prayer, the congregation meeting in Hosiers' Street, Reading, immediately adopted a similar resolution. The attendance was numerous, the spirit fervent, and the season solemn. The Sermon now presented to the public was preached by the author to his own people on the morning of the Lord's day following, in order to promote a spirit of exertion conformable with the attitude of prayer. It is primarily to them that he still addresses it from the press; and, if he commits it to a more extensive circulation, it is neither because he conceives himself to be particularly entitled to the attention of his brethren, nor because he has anything new or extraordinary to communicate; but because he rejoices to perceive a growing excitement in reference to the progress of religion, and would be happy to aid in giving it a right direction.

In attempting to do so, he has urged the adoption of a habit of personal and individual effort among the disciples of Christ for the conversion of the ungodly. It may, perhaps, occasion surprise that he should have thought it necessary to dwell on such a topic, in a day which claims to be regarded as pre-eminently characterized by Christian exertion. The writer is not wholly ignorant of the kind or the degree of activity which prevails in the religious world, in which, indeed, he has borne some humble part, and to which he wishes to do ample justice; but his deliberate opinion is that, while, in the kind of activity which exists, the degree is far from being just matter of complacency, there is a large sphere of obligatory effort criminally and almost totally neglected. He is ready to allow whatever can be justly said of the pecuniary liberality of the present period; he ac-

knowledges the zeal which is shown for the maintenance and extension of an official ministry; and with still greater pleasure does he contemplate the incipient labours of those who go "into the streets and lanes of the city:" but, to say nothing of the very partial and inadequate execution of these sacred duties and blessed enterprises, *what are the professors of religion doing individually to save sinners?* Let any man, in a spirit of the most fervent charity, make the inquiry respecting those whom he personally knows, and with whose general habits he is well acquainted: In what method, or to what extent, do these persons appear to try to rescue souls from death? The answer to this question could scarcely be far from the truth, since efforts of such a character are not easily concealed: but, inasmuch as they may be so in part, let every professor make the scrutiny perfectly accurate by carrying it into his own bosom, and seriously asking, What have I ever done, or what am I in the habit of doing, for the conversion of ungodly men? The writer has a strong conviction that, in comparison with its resources, almost nothing is done in this direction through the whole church of Christ. Amidst all the activity of the age, the direct means of conversion are for the most part resigned to professional hands, and the care of men's souls almost is as completely left to the ministers of the Gospel, as that of their bodies to the apothecary. With even the awakened anxiety of the present moment respecting the progress of religion, there is associated to a great extent the mistaken and injurious sentiment that the only thing wanting is a divine blessing, and that the only means to be used is prayer; or that, if any persons are to be more laborious, it is only the ministers. The Lord help his ministers to be more laborious! We have all need to be quickened in our work, and no faithful minister wishes to shrink from it. But this cherished feeling of exemption on the part of Christians at large is a great evil; it is one of the greatest evils of the present age. It lies like a mountain on the bosom of the church of Christ, and it oppresses the heart which would otherwise heave with far mightier throes for the salvation of the world. It stifles her voice; it paralyzes her hands; it induces a sluggishness of the general circulation, and with it a morbid want of sensibility, which renders it impossible to elicit even the existing signs of life, except by a system of excessive and unhealthy stimulants.

Nor can any rational hope be entertained of what seems to be so ardently longed for, namely, a revival of religion, until this vast slumbering body is aroused to throw off its *incubus*, and to bend its whole energies to the effort.

To the exhibition and the remedy of this evil the author of the following discourse has directed his attention. As was his duty, he has first addressed himself to the people of his immediate charge; but, if there be truth or value in the sentiments he has expressed, he earnestly commends them to the consideration of his remoter brethren. What exceptions may be justly claimed to the opinion he has formed he does not know; but, while he fears they are few, he is sure that those who are truly most devoted will not be the most eager to except themselves, or the most difficult of access to the influence of stimulant appeals. If there are some who could not say that they have ever strenuously tried to turn one sinner to God, what multitudes more must confess that they have suffered many to pass from their influence at whose conversion they ought to have aimed; that they have neglected innumerable opportunities in which such an object might have been hopefully pursued; and that they have surrendered many an hour to indolence, to luxury, or to folly, which a deeper tone of piety would have consecrated to this nobler end!

It may seem difficult to reconcile a state of inaction in a direction so obviously pointed out by divine truth, and so strongly congenial with devout feeling, with a lively state of experimental religion. The author is not disposed, however, to come to a very painful conclusion on this point. He conceives rather that this part of their duty has been overlooked, while the attention of Christians has been absorbed in their own edification. It cannot for a moment be supposed that the writer holds spiritual consolation and improvement in low estimation, or would insinuate that any person can be too earnest in the pursuit of them. But attention to an object, though not excessive in itself, may be so in comparison. It may be disproportionate; it may unawares lead us to forget another, which has equal, or at all events decisive, claims on our regard. This the writer conceives to have happened with Christian edification. Professors have desired this not too fervently, but too exclusively; and, while bent on satiating their own souls, they have not been alive to the relief of the

hungry and the perishing. Hence it is that you may find devout persons, who make no more direct effort to convert a sinner than if there were not such a being in the world. Hence it is, too, that the state of church-union loses in a great measure its appropriate character of activity; and, while it is valued as a pavilion into which the righteous may enter to pour out their sorrows, and find refuge from their trials, it ceases to resemble a fortress from which the soldiers of the Cross are continually issuing, to assail the kingdom of darkness, and rescue the captives of Satan. Hence, finally, it arises that even the ministry of the divine word has undergone a most injurious modification. The pastoral character in great part absorbs the ministerial, and the edification of the church takes precedence of the conversion of the world. In this manner the preaching of the Gospel loses its primary and most important aspect, to assume almost exclusively a secondary and less important one; and its main address is no longer to sinners, but to saints. The consummation of this process is, that ministers, being in the habit of speaking chiefly to the righteous, have few sinners to address; and at length, in some cases, come to the strange conclusion that they have nothing to say to the wicked if they were there. This corruption of the Gospel is a most afflictive one, and one for the origination and continuance of which the churches of Christ have to accuse chiefly themselves. The author would rejoice to promote an increasing readiness in Christians, not only to endure, but to welcome a large measure of address to the unconverted. He cannot but think that, if they felt a due pity for their condition, and were accustomed themselves to strive for their conversion, they would delight in such appeals, and be scarcely less happy to sit and pray for others than to be comforted themselves.

The author is well aware, that the habit of public exertion which the last thirty years has introduced is conceived to have been unfavourable to the cultivation of personal piety, and to have imparted to it, as known in the present day, a superficial character much to be regretted. Whatever justice there may be in this remark, it is obvious that the efforts he enforces cannot have a similar tendency. The evil has arisen from deserting private for public activity. To attend committees, to frequent public meetings, to undertake collections, to write reports, to make speeches, are things which, however

necessary, useful, or agreeable, tend not to feed, but to exhaust piety; and a man had need be of more than an ordinary standard, and maintain an unusual nearness to God, to sustain such a life without injury; while, in too many instances, these exertions have been suffered to abridge those devout retirements, in which the essential nourishment of religion is chiefly derived. The effect of personal effort to convert men will be altogether different. It takes no man far abroad. It begins at home, with his children and his servants. It accompanies him wherever he goes, and leads him precisely where he would go if he had no such object. Or, if it occasionally conducts him elsewhere, it is not to scenes of even religious dissipation, but to individual converse; it is to behold depravity and guilt, not in picturesque description, but in embodied misery; and to aim at the conversion of a soul, not by the loud plaudits of an orator, but by the compassionate pleadings of his own lips—not by the opening of a liberal purse, but by the more influential utterance of a melting heart. This is work to do a man's soul good; to teach him what it is to be a Christian, and what a Christian ought to be; to make him feel the value and the need of sterling principles of piety; and to send him to his knees, both with more fervent supplication and more ardent praise.

But the writer must check himself in a course of remark by which he is, perhaps, too long detaining his readers from the main subject of the discourse. What joy would it not afford him if each would peruse it with a spirit of serious examination and fervent prayer; and, without once thinking either of the Sermon or the author, yield his whole soul to conviction, penitence, and reformation!

MATTHEW V. 13.

“YE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH: BUT, IF THE SALT HAVE LOST ITS SAVOUR, WHEREWITH SHALL IT BE SALTED? IT IS THENCEFORTH GOOD FOR NOTHING, BUT TO BE CAST OUT, AND TRODDEN UNDER FOOT OF MEN.”

OUR attention has lately been directed to the very serious and affecting fact, that the progress of religion at the present period is by no means rapid; far less so than must be desired, and might be expected. On this account we have engaged in an exercise of extraordinary prayer; an occasion on which your attendance was gratifying, and on which we are assured that the God of Zion accepted graciously whatever of real prayer was presented at his footstool. Ever since that day, however, I have seemed to have ringing in my ears the words of the Lord to one of his ancient servants, “What doest thou here, Elijah?” Was it then wrong to pray? No: but it will be wrong to content ourselves with prayer. The question addressed to the prophet was designed to turn him from his lamentation over the idolatrous state of the Jewish nation, to his duty as its destined reformer; and we need equally to be directed from our supplications to our labours. We have presented our petitions at the throne of grace for the conversion of the world. Here is the answer to them: “YE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH.” As though the Lord had said, “The conversion of the world lies not only with me, it lies in part with yourselves. If it is mine to pour out a blessing, it is yours to employ the means upon which alone a blessing can rest. Depart, therefore, to your labour; and see that you are as faithful to your obligations as you have implored me to be to my promises.” Such ought to have been our spirit and our purpose while waiting at his throne; and, if indeed it were not, we could expect little else than to be driven from his presence with the indignant rebuke, “Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?” “Bring no more vain oblations; the calling of assemblies I cannot away with.”

I am constrained, therefore, by a solemn sense of duty, and by a deep feeling of its importance, to dwell upon this subject to-day, and to urge with affectionate importunity your obligation to instant activity. And though, in an effort which may encounter established habits of thought and feeling as well as of action, if I may not rather say of inaction and self-indulgence, I might be apprehensive of little success, the time, the circumstances, the remembrance of your prayers, together with the awakened interest and increased excitement of your minds, encourage a hope that it will not be in vain. At all events it is my duty to make the attempt: may God crown it with his blessing!

The passage before us divides itself into two portions. It contains, first, a general view of the relation which the disciples of Christ sustain to the world; and, secondly, a representation of the importance of fully maintaining the character assigned to us: "YE ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH. BUT, IF THE SALT HAVE LOST ITS SAVOUR, WHEREWITH SHALL IT BE SALTED? IT IS THENCEFORTH GOOD FOR NOTHING, BUT TO BE CAST OUT, AND TRODDEN UNDER FOOT OF MEN."

I. Our Lord here presents to us, in the first place, a general view of the relation which his disciples sustain to the world. They are THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

Of course this is figurative language. By the *earth* is doubtless intended the general mass of mankind. And when Christ speaks of the *salt* of the earth, he clearly intimates that mankind generally are in a state susceptible of, and, in truth, imperatively requiring, a beneficial change; as some substances under the action of salt receive an additional flavour, or are even preserved from decay. The assertion that his *disciples* are the salt of the earth, carries with it the idea of their fitness and destination to produce the contemplated effect. Let us mark the sentiments which the passage thus interpreted is adapted to convey.

1. It teaches us, in the first place, that mankind generally are in need of a beneficial change. The change to which the text refers is obviously a religious one; and the implication of it is that the great bulk of mankind are in an irreligious state. That this was the case at the time our Lord spoke is sufficiently manifest without particular proof; and, when we think of the wide tracts and multiplied nations yet scarcely, or not at all, enlightened by the Gospel, it can admit of no

doubt that it is so still. But can such a representation be truly made of human society within the more favoured limits of religious light and Christian profession? Is the bulk of Protestant countries, or of our own country, ungodly? Are the majority of our neighbours living without God in the world? Are the irreligious to be found in the circles of our acquaintance, and in the bosom of our families? To answer these questions it is needful to determine on what principle the answer shall be given. The grand inquiry is this: Is religion a matter of name and form, of relation and profession? Or is it personal, internal, and spiritual? If the former, then indeed may we look round upon the swarming population of our country with a complacent and delighted eye; but, if the latter, as we most solemnly believe to be the case, its aspect assumes a very different and a melancholy hue. "Except a man be born again," said our Divine Instructor, "he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3). "If any man be in Christ," says an inspired apostle, "he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new" (2 Cor. v. 17). "Be not deceived: God is not mocked. For what a man soweth that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap perdition; but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. vi. 7, 8). Judging by this rule, it must be admitted, with whatever pain, that the irreligious are to be found among us in numbers of a most afflictive amount. It is not the many who are characterized by piety and purity, by love to God and delight in his service, by self-denial and consecration to his glory. These, alas! are the few. Persons of a different character, under a thousand varied aspects, indeed, more or less amiable or unamiable, but all destitute of pure and undefiled religion, are everywhere discernible, both in the social and the domestic circle. Happy is the family in which every inmate is a friend of God; and that is yet more happy in which the same can be said of every relative. What circle in a neighbourhood could you describe, that should comprehend even a very few persons and not enclose an ungodly one? How often might you explore a similar compass without discovering a Christian indeed! In what thoroughfare could you stand, and receive a candid answer from every passenger, without perceiving that the mass of society is yet far from God? At

what point of general concourse could you attend, and observe the display of character elicited there, without a deep and melancholy conviction that the world still lieth in wickedness? Along what street, or through what hamlet, could you go, and take the most charitable glance into every dwelling, without ascertaining them to be, in a deplorable number of instances, habitations of ignorance, if not of vice? During what day can you conduct your ordinary concerns, without feeling yourselves brought into contact with many who have not the fear of God before their eyes? Oh! it is too true, that the great mass of human society, in the most favoured circumstances, needs to have added to it a flavour of godliness. Religion, real religion, is yet to be imparted, ere we can be truly called a Christian people; ere the stain of sin can be effaced, or its everlasting and calamitous consequences averted.

2. Our Lord's declaration that his disciples are the salt of the earth teaches us, in the second place, that they possess a fitness to produce this most desirable and important change; as salt is adapted to prevent the decay and improve the flavour of the substances to which it may be suitably applied. The truth of this representation will readily appear.

The first thing necessary to the conversion of a sinner is instruction; and every disciple of Christ, without excepting even the least informed, is in possession of sufficient knowledge for this purpose. He may know little; but, if he has been taught of God (and if he has not he is no disciple), he knows well and clearly both his guilt and his misery; together with the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, in its suitableness, its excellency, and its all-sufficiency. If he knows this he can teach it; and, if this is all he knows, as it is enough for his own salvation, so it is enough for the conversion of his neighbour. For Christ is "the wisdom of God, and the power of God" (1 Cor. i. 24); and to know him is to become wise unto salvation.

It is next important to the conversion of a sinner, that he should be addressed neither with harshness nor with coldness; but in a tone of deep feeling as to the general importance of salvation, and of fervent kindness in reference to his particular welfare. Such a mode of address is obviously most adapted to conciliate his regard, and to penetrate his heart. And this is just the tone which the disciple of Christ is pre-

pared to employ. Having been in a similar condition of wretchedness and ruin, he is qualified to feel tender compassion for that of his fellow-man; nor, even in endeavouring to convince of sin, can he well be harsh with the faults of another, since he has experienced a gracious forgiveness of his own. If he speaks, it may truly be expected to be with pity in his heart; and with a thrilling solemnity about the salvation of a soul, which, in his own case, has been so wonderfully rescued from everlasting burnings.

To this substantial fitness for attempting the conversion of sinners, may be added the incidental facilities arising from the circumstances and relations of life. The disciples of Christ, though separated from the world in their character and pursuits, are not so in their condition. Not *of* the world, they are still *in* it. They continue to sustain its various relations, and to possess the kindly and important influences which arise from them. In conversing on the concerns of religion, instead of speaking as a stranger, it will be in one case as a neighbour or an acquaintance; in another as a friend; in another as a relative, a brother or a sister, a parent or a child. All these circumstances give us facilities for speaking, they teach us how to speak, and they open many delightful avenues to the heart. Such intercourse has a great superiority over every other kind of address. How often may it be renewed! What advantage may be taken of occurrences perpetually varying! How easily may instruction be mingled with the kind offices of friendship, or be insinuated amidst the expressions of conjugal, fraternal, or parental love!

To crown all, the disciples of Christ are fitted to be the salt of the earth by the very force of piety itself. Religion gives a visible peculiarity to the character; it makes men different from what they were, and from what others are. And the character thus formed is an instructive one. It presents an aspect of happiness, loveliness, and excellence. It is a practical confirmation of that which has been poured from the lips, and appeals powerfully to the heart of the observer. "This man has been telling me," he may say within himself, "that I am unholy, and indeed his conduct puts me to shame. He has assured me that there is a happiness greater than any I have yet found; and I must believe it for I see it in his countenance. He tells me that religion

raises the character, and in truth I see a great change in him. It must be as he affirms." Thus a holy life has a voice. In more convincing tones it echoes the instructions of the lips which have already been as a fountain of wisdom. Its eloquence never ceases. It speaks when the tongue is silent, and is either a constant attraction or a perpetual reproof. It speaks on all subjects, and shows the nature and excellency of religion, both in duty and in trial, both in sorrows and in joys.

3. While it is thus manifest that the disciples of Christ are instruments admirably fitted for the conversion of men, the text leads us to observe, in the third place, that the accomplishment of this end requires a specific effort. Salt is adapted to impart a flavour, but it will not do so unless it is applied. It might be thought, perhaps, that the simple locality of true Christians, dispersed as they are through society in all its parts, would correspond sufficiently with the metaphorical import of the text in this particular; and it is true that, in consequence of this locality, without any specific effort, their example will shine, and may be expected to produce a measure of advantage; but it is obvious that the fitness for the conversion of sinners possessed by the disciples of Christ is not fully brought into action by this means. The influence of example, on the contrary, is only a part, and a very small part, of that which it is in their power to employ. It tends rather to confirm instruction which has been given, than in the first instance to convey it; nor can it have its full and proper efficacy, except as an illustration and seal of what the lips have uttered, and the ear has heard. The knowledge of divine things possessed by a Christian indeed cannot be made truly conducive to another's good without express communication; nor can the impressive seriousness and tender compassion which he feels find any such access to the heart as by the tones of the voice. Super-added to these, the influence of a holy conduct will be great and decisive; while, without them, it might rather impart an air of inconsistency to the general character. Must it not be deemed strange, that, if a man's life pleads for God, his lips should not plead too? And would not the consciousness that a Christian was studiously framing his conduct so as to exhibit the importance and excellency of religion, while he was yet silent on the subject, lead an ungodly man to say,

"I am surprised he does not speak to me about it"? If the salt is to impart its saltiness, it must be fully and directly applied: and if the disciples of Christ impart the benefits which they are fitted to convey, it can be only by bringing the whole of their character and aptitude into bearing. The tongue must be employed to communicate instruction, as well as the conduct to confirm it; and this too in all the circumstances of life, and on all the opportunities which its varied intercourse may afford. To fail of this is to abandon the grand instrument of our usefulness, and to leave the irreligious to their wretchedness and their ruin.

4. The declaration of our Lord indicates, fourthly, that his disciples are the appointed instruments for the conversion of the world. "Ye are THE SALT OF THE EARTH:" not only of the nature of salt to a savourless or putrefying mass; but THE SALT, by which specifically the mass is to be flavoured and preserved.

It cannot be intimated by this passage that the conversion of a sinner is a work, as to its actual accomplishment, within the compass of human power. Though it be only to instruct, to convince, and to persuade; though the motives are of immense power, and though the disciples of Christ do possess an eminent adaptation to it; yet it is foretold to us, by him who knows the secrets of all hearts, that the actual conversion of a sinner demands another and a superior agency. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord" (Zech. iv. 6). He works in those who believe with "the exceeding greatness of his power . . . which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead" (Eph. i. 19, 20). The influence which can change the heart is exclusively his own; and, however well adapted the means may be, or however zealously employed, without his blessing there will be no success. Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but "God giveth the increase" (1 Cor. iii. 6). The agency allotted to his people is clearly subordinate; and I trust that nothing I may say will be interpreted into a confounding of the work of the saints *for* conversion with the work of God the Holy Spirit *in* it. His is the efficient agency, theirs the instrumental. Keeping up a clear distinction between these two, that which we have now to observe is, that an instrumental agency in the conversion of the world is truly appointed to the saints. *THEY are the salt of the earth.*

Such a destination might be not obscurely inferred from the very fact that a character adapted to this end is formed in them. For there is in all the works of God, combined with boundless fulness, a strict economy of resources. Nothing is wanting, neither is anything wasted. With endless abundance there is no prodigality. Whatever the properties of anything may be, they are brought into action and use. If he has made great lights, it is to rule the day and to cheer the night. If he gives to the thirsty atmosphere supplies of moisture from the teeming earth, or permits it to drink ampler draughts from the swelling ocean, it is that the watery treasures of the sky may descend in blessings on the fruitful ground. It is necessary to his wisdom that it should be so: for “neither do *men* light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house” (Matt. v. 15). Now the works of nature are the pattern of the works of grace. If he suffers no beam of natural light to be kindled without an object, much less the brighter beams of light divine. If he has made us, who were once darkness, to be light in the Lord, it is that we may shine as lights in a dark place. Or, to return to the metaphor in our text, if he has made us as salt to a corrupt world, it is that we should be *the salt* of the earth, and diffuse on every hand the savour we have received. Were it not so, it would be production without design, the creation of an instrument without an object to be attained by it; an instance, in a word, and in him an incredible instance, of prodigality and wastefulness.

We are not left, however, to this inference alone. God has instructed us in the nature of his design by express directions as to our duty. Our text itself has the force of an injunction, that the salt should not lose its savour. And almost immediately afterwards it is added, “*Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matt. v. 16). It was to his disciples at large that Christ said, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark xvi. 15). He addresses the exhortation no less to every convert, “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee” (Mark v. 19). To this we may add the words of the apostle, “Have no fellowship with the unfruit-

ful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. v. 11). "Among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil. ii. 15, 16).

In accordance with the design which these injunctions discover, is the station of prominence and publicity in which Christ has placed his disciples. He has not suffered them to be either hidden or disguised. There is something in religion, indeed, which tends to make itself known, and will not suffer a Christian to be altogether concealed. But, in addition to this, our Lord has required from all his followers an avowal of their attachment to him, and a public dedication of themselves to his service. It is demanded of them to witness a good confession, in the face often of a wondering, and sometimes of a scoffing, world. They thus acquire an inevitable publicity. They are as a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid. Their prominence, like the elevation of a candle on a candlestick, is intended to enlarge the sphere of their influence; to make their light spread through a larger area, and reach a wider circumference. It adds nothing to their comfort; it rather increases their responsibility, and with it their cares, their difficulties, and their dangers; and it shows, therefore, the more strongly, that it is God's design in the conversion of one sinner to make him instrumental in the conversion of others.

The measures which he has actually pursued in reference to the prevalence of religion exactly correspond with the idea we are enforcing. After the departure of our risen Lord, the faith was "delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The diffusion of the Gospel was left in the hands of the disciples of that age, and it has equally been left in the hands of the disciples of every succeeding age. No instrumental agency for this end has been brought into bearing but the voluntary efforts of the people of God, nor is an intimation anywhere given that any other will hereafter be employed. The angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation; but no part appears to be allotted to them in the proclamation of the Gospel, or in the conversion of sinners. They rejoice in it, indeed, but it is as a work wrought by other hands. Nor are the spirits of the just made perfect called into the field of labour, though it could not but be highly delightful to them, and though they can scarcely be otherwise than, in some respects at least, pre-eminently

qualified for it. The whole of this instrumentality is confined to the living disciples of their Lord. Including in our language the whole of this body, it may be affirmed that nothing will ever be done for the conversion of the world but what we do for this end. We are the salt of the earth; and, if it derives no seasoning from us, it will derive none from any other quarter, but will proceed from its present corruption to its final perdition.

It is not to be imagined that so grievous a state and issue of things will be prevented by an abundant out-pouring of the Spirit; since there is no object to be attained by such an effusion but to give efficacy to means employed. To a work which is to be accomplished by means, the use of those means is as necessary as the power which is to give them success. Such a work is the conversion of the world. The earth is to be seasoned *by the saints*: and no further than their exertions are employed for this end, is there anything upon which the influence of the Spirit may rest, or to which his gracious efficacy will be imparted.

5. We have yet further to observe, fifthly, that the design of our Lord respecting the beneficial instrumentality of his disciples is universal; or rather, without limitation.

On the one hand, it comprehends the whole number of his followers. When he says—"YE are the salt of the earth," he contemplates no particular portion of them, but the body at large. The words occur in a discourse which cannot be alleged to have any special reference to the apostles; nor can they by any means be confined to the multitude then in attendance on his ministry. Nor is there any reason why a limitation should be assigned to them. It is obvious, indeed, that a great diversity in point of knowledge and ability, wealth and influence, exists among Christians; but it should be remembered, that these are not the things in which their adaptation to usefulness has been shown to consist. That which fits a follower of Christ to do good is that he knows the value of a Saviour, that he feels the importance of eternity, and that he can confirm his words by his example. These qualifications will be found to obtain universally, and perhaps most abundantly where least suspected. If there be one found totally deficient in them, let it be admitted that he is not to be reckoned among the salt of the earth; but it will surely be difficult to retain him in the family of God. And

if every disciple of Christ, however obscure in his circumstances or destitute of general information, possesses in fact the essential requisites for the conversion of the world, it needs nothing more to demonstrate that he was intended to co-operate in the work.

On the other hand, as the language of the text carries universality with it when indicating the class of agents to be employed, it has a similar force when it refers to the sphere of their influence. "Ye are the salt of THE EARTH:" not of a portion of the earth merely, but of the whole. It is clear that the efforts of each individual will naturally commence with those in immediate contact with him, nor can it be expected that many will be able to extend their endeavours beyond a small circle of relations and neighbours. Yet it is not difficult to trace the tendency of such operations to the conversion of the world. Each little circle thus formed has a principle of increase, and will extend its limits until it blends itself with others by which it may be more or less nearly surrounded. These larger circles, again, will augment their circumference continually, both by the essential activity of the extreme points, and by throwing outwards the energy which may be accumulated at the centre, and less urgently required in the area already occupied. Nor can any limit be assigned to this progress, until the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. And this is the scope marked out by Christ for the influence of his followers. "Ye are the salt of THE EARTH;" adequate and destined to the conversion of the world.

6. We observe, finally, that the language of our Lord encourages a confident expectation of success.

Though nothing is expressly said on the subject, the very appointment of the means to the end involves this idea. Consider who it is that speaks. It is not merely that a casual observer has discovered an aptitude in pious persons to induce piety in others; but it is the voice of the Redeemer himself, in the first instance declaring the adequate adaptation of his followers to the instrumental conversion of the world, and then announcing his design that they should effect it. It is inconceivable that he should have chosen for such a purpose an insufficient agency; or that, having appointed one, he should withhold the blessing needful to its success. His affirmation that his disciples are the salt of the earth, is

equivalent to saying that their attempts for its conversion shall be triumphant. When we know the only means which he will employ for this or any other purpose, we know also that those means will infallibly succeed.

It may be felt, perhaps, that this representation scarcely corresponds with the facts within our observation. Many efforts have been made for the conversion of individuals which have not succeeded. But in how many instances is want of success precipitately inferred? Who can tell, till the day shall declare it, with what happy results our endeavours may have been crowned? And in instances of effort really unsuccessful, how probably may the failure be referred to the want of ardour! How much greater our reward might have been, had we laboured as we ought! But, in truth, the language of the text is not of an individual but a general reference; so that the success of individual Christians must be distinguished from that of the body, and the conversion of individual sinners from that of the world. An occasional failure in the former case, or final impenitence in the latter, does not invalidate the general truth. In the end the whole earth will be brought to glorify God, and this blessed result will be achieved by the instrumentality of the saints. They are the salt of the earth, and by them shall the corrupt mass be seasoned.

Having thus briefly surveyed the relation which the disciples of Christ bear to the world, it is important before we proceed to glance at the aspects which it wears.

1. The institution of this relation must be regarded, first, as *an exercise of the Redeemer's WISDOM*. It has not happened accidentally, but has been deliberately arranged; and he has adopted this course, doubtless, not through any constraint or necessity, but because he saw it wisest and best. There is in it a fitness and excellency which made it seem good in his eyes: it is to be regarded, therefore, with the highest reverence and respect.

But this is not all. Vain as it would be to suppose that we could discern the whole reasons which, in any case, may have determined the only-wise God, there are few instances in which we may not discern some of them; nor is it by any means difficult to trace the wisdom of the arrangement, that the conversion of the world should be effected by those who have already been called by his grace.

It is a method which brings into operation existing resources. It is characteristic of wisdom to expend no more on an object than its attainment requires, and to accomplish with instruments already formed everything for which they are properly adapted. On this principle the conduct of our Lord proceeds. He has an end to attain, namely, the conversion of the world. He might easily produce new instruments for accomplishing it; but why should he make such an effort without cause? Has he in his present works any agents adapted to the end? Assuredly he has. Though they are few and feeble, his disciples are so; and he employs them. "YE are the salt of the earth; YE are the light of the world." Here is true and dignified economy, associated with boundless wealth. It is wisdom turning to the fullest and best account all the resources it commands.

The method he has chosen is, also, pre-eminently suitable, easy, and effectual. Let it be compared with the methods by which the same end has been attempted according to the wisdom of men. Place it, for example, by the side of endowed establishments for the maintenance and propagation of the Gospel, or compare it with the institution of a highly educated order of legalized clergy, irrespective as both these systems must be of any spiritual character. O how much more good has unlettered and individual piety achieved in every age, than all this magnificent and showy apparatus!

You will not suppose me to depreciate for a moment either of those most important and obligatory means of aiding the progress of religion—the stated ministry of the Gospel, or missions to the heathen; but place even them in comparison with universal personal endeavour, and the result will be greatly in its favour. Missionaries and ministers are comparatively few, and provided with difficulty; individual effort brings hundreds of thousands of labourers into the field in a moment. The support of ministers and missionaries involves (however unwillingly) a large annual expenditure; but for every Christian to labour at home costs absolutely nothing. Missionaries have to make great sacrifices, to run great risks, and often to fill an early grave; while individual effort involves no hazard, bereaves no parents, afflicts no family. A man sent abroad goes as a stranger, with a thousand impediments to encounter; in seeking to convert our neighbours and our friends our way is open, our counte-

nances are known, our language is understood, our influence is felt, our intention is appreciated. Private Christians have many advantages over ministers of the Gospel, even in the most favoured circumstances. The one speak in virtue of their office, and often under a degree of suspicion as to their sincerity; the other can speak from no motive but unfeigned love. The one can address their hearers but occasionally; the other may do it frequently, and follow up their instructions by almost incessant watchfulness and admonition. The one speak as comparative strangers; the other may employ the more touching eloquence of social kindness, of ardent friendship, and, perhaps, of fraternal or parental love. The one can speak only to those who choose to attend on his ministry; the other are scattered through society in all its paths, and can carry instruction and reproof to the heedless and the abandoned. Had there been nothing instituted, therefore, but the public preaching of the Gospel, whether at home or abroad, the easiest, most extensive, and most effectual means of converting the world would have been overlooked. Superficial observers might have conceived that little result could have been expected from even a multitude of such feeble efforts as those of individual Christians; in the same way as one might at first exclaim, Who would think of setting bounds to the sea by a sand-bank! but he who knew that grains of sand form the only effectual barrier to the raging waters, discerned too that grains of salt would best season the corrupted world. He has, indeed, done well in instituting a public ministry; but the consummateness of his wisdom lies in evoking the individual energy of his people. "YE are the salt of the earth; YE are the light of the world."

2. In the second place, the language of our divine Lord must be regarded as *an expression of his WILL*. It clearly marks out the line of conduct which he would have his disciples pursue, and is fully equivalent to a command. "*Ye are the salt of the earth.*" It is as though he had said, "By my grace I have fitted you, and in my good pleasure I have appointed you, to be the instruments of converting the world. *BE YE the salt of the earth.* Everywhere let your influence be felt, and your capabilities be exerted." The text necessarily assumes this aspect, because the result anticipated implies and requires the voluntary effort of the followers of

Christ. The corrupt earth will not be seasoned by the mere fact of Christians being scattered through it, without their endeavours to instruct, to convince, and to persuade. The Lord's declaration, therefore, must be our directory. Let us charge it upon ourselves solemnly, if we are disciples indeed, that it be with us an object of real and practical endeavour to do everything that can be done for the conversion of sinners. We are not called upon merely to cherish a desire, however fervent, that sinners may be converted, or even to pray, with whatever enlargement, for this blessing; neither are we to content ourselves with remote and indirect efforts for this end, such as supporting the ministry of the Gospel, or promoting missions to the heathen: that which is demanded is our *personal labour*. We are individually summoned to use the direct means of conversion; to be the salt of the earth.

The means of conversion are of great variety. Among them undoubtedly may be reckoned endeavours to circulate the Holy Scriptures, and to put into the hands of every man the volume which is able to make him wise unto salvation. But this is not all, nor even chief. The intention of Christ, as expressed in this passage, plainly is, that the actual character of his disciples should be brought into complete contact with that of ungodly men; for *they* are the *salt* of the earth. The words lead us of necessity, therefore, to the use of such means of conversion as express this character, namely, to conversation of an instructive, convincing, or persuasive tendency; to serious admonition, or even pointed reproof; to affectionate prayer; and the subserviency to this object of all the intercourse of life, as the writing of letters, occasional visits, offices of kindness, and the influence of relationship or domestic association. It is thus by direct and personal effort that a disciple of Christ should seek the conversion of sinners.

And this should be the attitude of *every* disciple. None are exempt from the appointment, none are destitute of the qualification. None are without fitness for the work, and none are at liberty to decline it. It may easily be said by some, My ability is very small: and without entering into any argument on this point, I only say that, whatever it may be, it is enough, with God's blessing, to convert sinners. Besides, does not Christ know what it is? Is it not such as

he has given you? Is it not such as he requires to be employed? Do you presume to say that what he has prepared for beneficial action is unfit for it, or that what he demands for this purpose shall be refused? However small a portion, you still are a portion of the salt of the earth: see that you act as such. The less your talent, the more need of activity. Beware lest your plea of incompetency be but a cloak for your indolence. Do not so much covet the ability of others, as show diligence in the application of your own.

It may with equal ease be said by others, My station is obscure, and my influence small. Granted: but you will also admit, on the other hand, that, however narrow your circle may be, it is nevertheless a circle of some dimensions that you occupy. You do not stand alone upon the earth. You have *some* relatives, acquaintance, and neighbours. And are they all pious? If you were to try earnestly, could you not reach any who are living without God? Behold, then, your duty. Labour for the conversion of these unhappy persons; and wrap yourself no longer in the delusion, that in this direction Christ can require and expect nothing *from you*.

It may with truth be alleged by a third class that they are excessively busy, and are thrown into situations in life which demand all their time and all their power; they surely may leave the work of converting sinners to more leisure hands. Yes; if you are willing to abandon your hope of salvation, and to give up your interest in Christ; but *not else*. If you are his disciples, you are also the salt of the earth; and not the busiest man in the world is at liberty to relinquish one part of the character, and to imagine that he can retain the other. But the allegation supposed is, in all probability, truth exaggerated into the character of falsehood. You either have, or might have, some leisure in the early morning; and you allot the evening hours to the agreeable relaxation of domestic or social intercourse. Does a feeling of surprise, to say no more, start up in your bosom at the mention of these things? You are upon the verge then of discovering that it is not time you want, but inclination? Be assured that this is the fact; and that, however closely engaged, you ought to find, and may find if you are disposed, means of specific exertion for the salvation both of your

domestic inmates, your acquaintance, and your neighbours ; while a similar aim may run through even the busiest of those busy hours, which, so far from becoming a plea for your total exemption from labour, ought to be regarded as furnishing you with incessant opportunities of promoting this blessed end.

The duty of labouring directly and individually for the conversion of sinners is, in a word, one from which none of the followers of Christ can be excused. He knows the varied talents and circumstances of all ; and comprehends them all in the declaration, "YE are the salt of the earth."

Further, if endeavours to convert ungodly men should be recognized as a duty by every disciple of Christ, it should also be esteemed a duty of the highest moment. Of our many duties none are without importance, but in this respect all are not equal. Our first duties are those which relate to our own salvation, and the next are those which relate to the salvation of others. By the immense magnitude of the object, and its direct reference to the glory of God and the highest happiness of our fellow-creatures, these take the decided precedence of all duties respecting the temporal interest, either of ourselves or of others. I am very well aware how often the callings of life will allow but a comparatively small portion of time to be applied to it ; but the same may be said of the cultivation of personal piety, which is nevertheless our first duty. What we mean by this is, that the attainment of this end should hold the highest place in our desires, that it should be our chief aim, and that all other affairs should be so arranged as to afford us the amplest possible opportunities of pursuing it. So, when we say that endeavours for the conversion of sinners form the second class of our duties, we mean that, next to our own salvation, we should feel more concerned about this than any other object ; that it should be actually second among the great aims of life ; and that our affairs should be so ordered as to allow us the utmost practicable opportunity of promoting it. We mean that, when a Christian asks himself, For what great ends do I live ? he should be able to say, first for the good of my own soul ; next for the conversion of others ; and only after this for the diligent prosecution of my worldly calling, and efforts of temporal benevolence.

No duty, rightly understood, clashes with another. And

as it happens with our first duty, that of securing our own salvation, so it is with our second, that of seeking the salvation of others, that an attention to it requires no interference with a due regard to earthly affairs. While we are diligent in business, as, on the one hand, we may be also fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; so, on the other, we may be animated by a deep concern for the spiritual welfare of those around us, and be ready to embrace every opportunity of advancing it, as a matter far more important than any secular advantage. And nothing short of this is the state of feeling and of action to which our Lord calls us, when he says, "Ye are the salt of the earth."

3. In the third place, the declaration of our blessed Redeemer may be considered as an *exhibition of his CONDESCENDING GRACE*. The conversion of the world is an operation for which he has ample resources, without employing our aid. It might be accomplished by his immediate power alone, without the intervention of any instrumentality; or, if any intermediate agency were accepted, it could be a matter of no necessity to engage our own. It is, in truth, a display of wonderful condescension that he should choose to employ instruments so feeble and unworthy; to associate with himself in a work so glorious creatures so mean and insignificant; and to employ for the conversion of his remaining enemies those who, but a little before, were enemies and rebels themselves.

Among the reasons which have induced him to do so, we are authorized to assign a powerful influence to his kindness towards his people. It was not surely that he would lay on them a burden, or encompass them with difficulties; but rather that he wished to enlarge their happiness. He had a work to perform the execution of which afforded the most exquisite bliss, and the most exalted honour. He was about, not to produce a world, but to restore one which sin had destroyed; to bring out of moral chaos a new creation of righteousness and joy, in glory far exceeding the wonders and beauties of the first; to open the blind eyes, that the light of the knowledge of his glory might shine into them in the face of Jesus Christ; to break the stony heart, that he might pour into it the balm of his love; to quicken dead souls, that, like his blessed ones in heaven, they might live unto God; to bring floods of penitence from the flinty rock,

that he might pronounce the forgiveness of sins ; to purify the corrupt mind, that he might adorn it with celestial graces, and himself dwell therein for ever ; to open the bosom which had been barred against him, that he might shed abroad consolations in a world of sorrows, and inspire the peace which passeth all understanding ; to allure the wretched and ready to perish to a feast of eternal gladness ; and to stretch out his mighty arm to snatch the lost from perdition, as brands out of the fire. And being about to do this, he seems to have been unwilling to confine to himself either the honour or the joy. It is as though he had looked for some whom he loved well enough to make them partakers of his blessedness ; and he has conferred the privilege upon his saints. "YE," says he, "shall be the salt of the earth, the light of the world. The knowledge of my truth shall be spread by your instructions, and the flame of piety kindled from your hearts. The perishing wretches who receive the forgiveness of sins, shall trace the unspeakable benefit to a fellow-creature's hand. The obdurate whose heart melts under the influence of my love, shall remember that he heard of it from a brother's or a parent's lips. Thus my disciples shall have the luxury of conveying the richest boon that almighty grace can give ; of making the avenues of earthly affection ways of access for everlasting joy ; and of becoming, amidst all their poverty, the highest benefactors of their kind. These, who are sharers of my heart, shall also be sharers of my joy ; and I will put upon them a portion of the honour with which I myself shall be clothed, as the Saviour of the world."

Say, beloved brethren, whether condescending love could have presented to us a greater privilege. We know the luxury of doing good in the communication of temporal benefits ; how much more in conveying those which are eternal ! It is no ordinary pleasure to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to relieve the wretched, to comfort the mourner ; but how much more delightful must it be, to be the instruments of enlightening the ignorant, of humbling the proud, of subduing the obdurate, of reclaiming the profligate, of saving a soul from death, and hiding a multitude of sins ! What benefits can we convey, what sorrows can we alleviate, what consolations can we impart, once to be compared with those which respect an eternal world ?

And if this consideration is not destitute of power in its general bearing, how touching does it become when applied to the smaller circles of life! If it would afford me joy to convert a stranger, how much more a friend! If it were delightful to induce piety in a neighbour, how much more in a child! In these narrow spheres our warmest affections flow forth. It is among the chief pleasures of our lives to become ample benefactors to our families in all that relates to this world; and O! what joy unspeakable to be permitted to convey to them the all-important blessings of the next!

Nor is the *honour* small which God thus puts upon us. We should deem ourselves honoured if he were to make us the instruments of saving a fellow-creature from death; how much more if he will employ us in rescuing one from everlasting burnings! To do good is one of the loveliest characteristics of God himself, and to be the essential fountain of good is one of his chief prerogatives. He allows us a measure of his own felicity and glory when he permits us to convey any benefit; but he does so pre-eminently when he confides to us the transfer of spiritual blessings. In this chief of his works such an arrangement associates us with himself, and presents us to the eyes of all as workers together with God.

And as it makes us a link in the chain of second causes through which God transmits the efficacious influence which brings all his designs to pass, so it equally includes us in the train through which the gratitude of those by whom blessings are received will return to him. As all benefits come ultimately from him, so to him, undoubtedly, will be all the glory and praise; yet the gratitude inspired will breathe most fragrantly, as it ascends, upon those who become the instruments of his goodness. It is thus that efforts of temporal benevolence bring upon our heads the blessing of those who were ready to perish, and often fill the heart with a mingled sense of luxury and unworthiness almost overwhelming: but how inexpressibly touching will *their* accents be, who, amidst heartfelt benedictions, shall say, "You, like the Saviour, came to seek and to save the lost; you taught us to know our sinfulness and our misery; you prayed over us when we would not pray for ourselves, and led us by your importunities to his feet who hath delivered us from the wrath to come!"

II. Such, then, is the relation which the disciples of Christ sustain to the world. Let us proceed, in the second place, to the representation which the text contains of the importance of maintaining the character assigned to us. "Ye are the salt of the earth: BUT, IF THE SALT HAVE LOST ITS SAVOUR, WHEREWITH SHALL IT BE SALTED? IT IS THENCEFORTH GOOD FOR NOTHING, BUT TO BE CAST OUT, AND TRODDEN UNDER FOOT OF MEN."

1. Here it is necessary for us to inquire, what is to be understood by *the salt having lost its savour*, or saltiness. This must be conceived to take place when the character and conduct of a professed disciple of Christ are not adapted to promote the conversion of sinners.

Such a state may arise in two ways. Upon the supposition that a professor does exert himself for this end, his conduct may be so inconsistent, as not merely to fail of adding to the effect of his words, but to diminish, and even to destroy it. Such would be the case, for example, if he were subject to occasional intemperance, or given to an indulgence of appetite; if he were known to deal fraudulently, or to take unfair and ungenerous advantages; if he were a man of unbridled passion, or ill-regulated temper; if he were of a wanton tongue, or a heedless retailer of scandal; if he were a man of covetousness, or grinding to the poor; if he were engrossed in worldly pursuits, or in schemes of aggrandizement; if he were characterized by a prevailing spirit of levity; or if, in short, his conduct were in any obvious degree otherwise than exemplary. In such a case the salt would have lost its savour. Such a person's conduct would have no tendency to convince an observer of the importance or excellency of religion, but the contrary. Even if he were to speak on the subject, with whatever vehemence, he would scarcely fail to induce the reply, "If religion should not do more for me than it has done for you, it will do me little good."

But, in addition to *consistency*, there is a *studied and intentional exemplariness* which is necessary to the full savouriness of a Christian. It is not only that our example should exercise a right influence when it exercises any at all, or that it should be left to produce what effect it may in a consistent walk; but that it should be studiously and constantly framed with a view to its influence. This is the express direction of our Lord in immediate connexion with the

text: "Let your light so shine before men, *that they may see your good works*, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. v. 16). Such expressions of Christian temper and character, therefore, as are adapted to be useful to others should be conspicuous in our conduct as observed by them, and be rendered so for the purpose of doing them good. Our aim should be, notwithstanding the occasional depression arising from the trials of life, by an habitual cheerfulness to show religion to be, what it really is to us, a source of the highest happiness; to do everything so well, so manifestly upon right principles and for a right end, as to evince the perpetual operation of piety; and to avoid everything, even at the expense of personal sacrifices, by which our conduct might be rendered liable to misconstruction, and rendered less striking in its aspect, or less beneficial in its influence. I know that such a method requires as much of deliberate purpose and effort as specific conversation; but it is certain that professors who fail to use their example with this holy wisdom are as salt which has lost its savour.

A similar state is indicated by defectiveness in the direct and individual effort which we have already described. The savouriness of salt is its readiness to impart its flavour to the substance to which it is applied; and, in like manner, the savouriness of a Christian is the readiness which he manifests to diffuse the sentiments which animate him: a religious professor, therefore, has lost his savour, if, under whatever circumstances, he is content to live without actually trying to convert some person; and, in truth, if he does not endeavour to convert every ungodly person to whom he can consistently gain access. It will not serve to free us from this charge that we contribute to a regular ministry, and that we aid missions to the heathen abroad or to the ignorant at home. *We* are, or should be, the salt of the earth. Our duty is that of personal exertion, in all the avenues that are open to us.

The text leads us next to speak of the *evil* of such a state; but before we do so, let us pause, for the purpose of a close and serious examination of ourselves upon this point: *How far have any of us lost our savour?* The question may, perhaps, be painful at its first aspect; it may bring an immediate conviction that we are guilty; but let us not therefore evade it, nor be content with a general acknowledgment of our

fault. As it is important that our criminality should not be wholly concealed from us, it is scarcely less so that our perception of it should be accurate and comprehensive. Let us be willing to know our whole error. How otherwise can we expect to be adequately humbled, or to attain an effectual remedy? A desire to hide such an evil, if it could be supposed to exist in any bosom, would indicate a state of mind inexpressibly lamentable. Whatever our faults are, may God give us an openness of heart to welcome investigation and rebuke, and to implore the quickening influences of his grace!

Our general inquiry is, whether, as professed disciples of Christ, we are duly exerting ourselves for the conversion of sinners. Let me carry it into particulars, and suppose that you, dear hearer, are a husband or a wife with a partner who knows not the Lord; and let me ask you, not only whether this is a grief to you, nor only whether it awakens you to prayer, but whether you are *doing* anything to induce conversion. What means, and with how much diligence, have you employed to convey instruction? When, and how often, has the tenderness of conjugal love thrown its softening influence into an expostulation with a heart obdurate in sin? With how much frequency has your affection been shown to dwell intensely on the spiritual and eternal welfare of so dear a friend? With what constancy of endeavour have you so regulated your temper, and every department of your conduct, that it might add the stamp of truth and the power of eloquence to what your lips have uttered?

Or let me suppose you are parents with children as yet unconverted; and then I ask, not merely what you have *felt* for their salvation, but what you have *done* for it? What efforts have you made to acquaint them with their duty to God, and to inspire them with love to Christ? With what diligence have you plied the task of imbuing their minds with seriousness, and repressing youthful vanity? With what ardour have you striven to make them feel that your most intense anxiety respects their salvation, and that, if this be not attained, it will be an unutterable affliction to you that they have ever lived? How sedulously has the fondness of parental caresses been directed to lead them to the Saviour? How studiously have you exemplified before their eyes the importance you attach to prayer and the

fear of God, and their influence upon the temper and the tongue?

Let me suppose that you are a master, or a mistress, having servants not religious in your house. I ask, then, Have you done anything for their conversion? Have you ever inquired into the state of their minds, or endeavoured to ascertain the degree of their knowledge? Have you used means to impress them with a deep sense of the value of their souls, and employed the influence of your station to induce them to listen to the things that belong to their peace? Have you enjoined and promoted their attendance at the house of God, and inquired into their profiting by it? Have you provided for and encouraged the reading of the Scriptures and other instructive books? Have you allowed time for retirement, and urged its improvement for reflection and prayer? Have you required their presence at your family worship, and made it an instructive and impressive exercise? Has your just authority been used to prohibit vice, and discountenance levity? And have you charged them, not as servants only, but as children, with an affectionate kindness to which your character will give the greater weight, that they serve and fear the Lord?

Let me suppose that, in addition to domestic servants, you have to do with others; with some, perhaps, in the family as apprentices, or with others as labourers, or persons employed by you in business. I ask in this case whether you have attempted their conversion? What endeavour have you made to convince them of the sin and folly of an ungodly life? When did you urge them to a right employment of the Sabbath? What touching proof have you given them that their souls are precious to you, or what have you done to render them precious to themselves?

Or I may suppose you to be a younger member of a family; a brother, or a sister. Perhaps not any, or, if some, not all, of your brothers and sisters know the Lord; or you may have the grief of beholding one or both of your parents in ignorance of him. I ask you then, What means have you used for the conversion of any of these? Have you spoken kindly to a brother or a sister about the welfare of the soul? Have you read to them, or prayed with them? What ingenuity have you employed to bring under a parent's notice a subject so interesting to your heart? What effort have you

made, at once to avoid a censorious or dictatorial conduct, and yet to show an exemplary and instructive one? What have you done to make them feel that it is one great end of your life to lead them to the Saviour?

Perhaps you hold an inferior, and yet an honourable, situation in the domestic sphere. You may be a servant, either alone or associated with others. Perhaps the family are strangers to God: and what tendency have any of your efforts had to their conversion? Has the power of example, which may perhaps be your chief instrument there, been carefully employed by you? Have you been so far heedless, so often out of temper, or so quick in answering again, as to cause it to be felt that it is a disagreeable thing to have a pious servant in the house? Or have you tried, by showing in your character what religion can do, to make even those understand its excellency to whom you cannot with propriety speak on such a subject? Opportunities of speaking on it, however, must often arise: have you improved them? Have you, in a word, laboured for their conversion more than for anything else in the world, your own salvation excepted? Or perhaps your fellow-servants are ignorant of Christ: what has been your conduct towards them? Have you fallen in with their levity, so as to encourage them in it? Or have you tried to wean them from it by the cheerfulness of piety? What savour of seriousness has pervaded your conversation? With what fervour and affection have you endeavoured to save them?

I may suppose that you occupy a place in a large circle of relations; that you belong to a family widely dispersed, yet in its various branches occasionally meeting; but not, alas! *all* united in everlasting bonds. What have you done to bring these fragments into the blessed union? Have your letters been impregnated with a savour of piety? Have your occasional interviews been seasons of solemn endeavour to engage their hearts for Christ? Have you sought opportunities, or have you embraced such as arose unsought, for alluring their souls to eternal life?

I may suppose, finally, that you have a more extended connexion with society, and with the world. You have a circle of friends, a wider circle of acquaintance, and a circle still wider of general intercourse. What have you done for the conversion of any of them? Which of your neighbours

has heard the Gospel from you? When has the confidential intercourse of friendship turned solemnly on your friend's best interests? With what resolution and ingenuity has the course of general conversation been directed to spiritual improvement?

These inquiries are not many, but few; and merely a specimen of those which we should address to ourselves, according to the peculiarities of our condition. I may, perhaps, have addressed them to some professors of religion who can give none of them a satisfactory answer; who really never think of trying to convert any one. You imagine that you feel for the conversion of sinners, you concur outwardly in praying for them, you support the ministry of the Gospel and missions to the heathen; but this is all. The ungodly are, without exception, abandoned by you to the efforts of others. Neither husband nor wife, neither child nor grandchild, neither friend nor neighbour, do you endeavour to instruct or to save. O salt of the earth! if it be thus with you, you have lost your savour.

Doubtless many of you are not subject to so severe a censure. There are some for whose salvation you are labouring. But is this number as comprehensive as it ought to be? You seek the conversion of your children, but perhaps not that of your servants; of your servants, but perhaps not of your labourers; of your relatives at home, but perhaps not of your relatives abroad; of your family, but perhaps not of your friends; of your friends, but perhaps not of your neighbours. You try to convert a brother or a sister, but perhaps not a parent; a fellow-servant, but not a master, or a mistress; an equal, but not a superior. Yet why should it be so? In all these directions you are both fitted and intended to exert the characteristic influence of piety. O salt of the earth! if it be thus with you, in a great degree you have lost your savour.

It is yet further to be examined, whether, if your efforts are directed to all the proper objects of them, they are employed with a due fervency. Of the opportunities which present themselves you improve some; how many do you neglect? Would not many more occur to you if you were closely on the watch for them? Might not more good be generally done, if you were prompt in beginning your work and diligent in pursuing it? Might not more seriousness

and affection be thrown into your efforts? Are your endeavours of this kind anything like the great business of life? Or does it seem with you rather like a subordinate concern; a useful thing, if you have time and inclination for it; something which may fill up the crevices of the day, if the world leaves any empty; and occupy just the fragments of time and the remnants of exhausted strength, while life's great end is business or labour, pleasure or ambition? O salt of the earth! if it be thus with you, to an extent much to be deplored you have lost your savour.

I know not that any Christian can hold himself clear from this charge. In truth, he that feels most and does most for the salvation of men, is the likeliest to acknowledge that he both does and feels much less than he ought. Was the warmest zeal which ever glowed in the heart of man adequate to the claims of an object which has engaged the whole ardour of the Almighty? And what can he feel whose whole soul is devoted to it, but that even such a consecration is far below the glory of the end?

What would our feelings be if we were on our death-bed, just entering into a dread eternity? What, if we were standing at the judgment-seat of Christ? What, above all, if we were actually beholding the dismay of the guilty there, and the awful terrors amidst which the wicked will be driven into hell, even all those who forget God? Ah! would not our emotions at such a sight be of an overwhelming power, and smite us with astonishment and shame that they should ever have been so slender? Yet we should see nothing then but the truth, and feel nothing but what the truth demands. And, if our hearts were more deeply moved, our exertions would be proportionately augmented. What eager vigilance would be employed to watch for occasions of usefulness; nay, what holy ingenuity in creating them! What precious portions of time would be rescued from trifles; or what golden hours obtained by a wise arrangement of our affairs! How gladly would the period of sleep be curtailed in the morning, and that of relaxation in the evening hours! What a vein of piety would run through the mass of our ordinary intercourse, adapted to enrich even a passing stranger with inestimable treasure! O salt of the earth! if it be not thus with us, in an afflictive measure we have all lost our savour.

2. With a conviction, then, of our personal share in the

state described, let us go on to consider the representation here given of its evil. "*If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men.*"

(1). We are thus led to observe, in the first place, that, when the disciples of Christ are not in vigorous action for the salvation of sinners, it frustrates an important part of the design of their conversion.

The chief end of God in conversion is the glory of his holy name, through Jesus Christ: but there are also to be answered subordinate ends, in the attainment of which, in truth, the accomplishment of the primary object is involved. The first of these is the eternal blessedness of the sinner himself; the next is his utility as an instrument of converting others. Redeemed sinners are the very agents, and the only agents, which the Almighty forms for the conversion of the world. He lights the candle that it may shed light around. He has seasoned us with grace that we may season the earth. Let it be set down by us, therefore, as a certain and weighty truth, that our usefulness in the salvation of others was the second, and but the second, great end he contemplated in our own. It is one of the grand methods by which he has designed us to show forth his praise.

Now nothing can be more binding, and nothing ought to be more delightful, than to fall in with God's designs respecting us, and to fulfil the good pleasure of his will. The force of all the mercy, the rich and unspeakable mercy, which he has shown us, leads us in this direction; according to the language of the apostle, "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye yield yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. xii. 1). "For ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: wherefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are God's" (1 Cor. vi. 20). In agreement with this exhortation are the aspirations of every renewed heart; with Saul, ready to ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts ix. 6); and with him ready to reply, "The love of Christ constraineth me; because I thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that those who live should henceforth not live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. v. 14, 15). And such have been the vows, if they

have been anything better than hypocrisy, which we have often presented to our adorable Redeemer at his throne, and at his table.

Can we, then, bear to think that there is any part of his will concerning us which we do not fulfil; that in any line of activity he has marked out for us we are sluggish and ineffective? Is this our fidelity to the vows we have so frequently implored him to accept? Is this our evidence of grace? Is this our kindness to our friend, and the return we are content to make him for his love? Forbid it all that is influential in gratitude, or faithful in friendship, or sincere in piety!

But, if there be force in such a reflexion in reference to any part of God's will, how much more when it applies to a particular of pre-eminent magnitude! Our activity for the conversion of others is no trivial thing with him. Next to our salvation, it is the chief end for which he has called us by his grace, and it is the grand use to which he has intended to put us in the world. It is an object of the utmost importance in his view, and of the highest glory to his name; an object on which he has concentrated all the counsels of eternity, on which he has expended the amplest resources of his nature, for which he has poured forth the blood of his Son, and to which he is bending the whole administration of his providence. And is it to his purpose in such a point as this that we can be indifferent? Is it here that we fail to sympathize with him, or are slow in coming forth to his help? Is it to the losing of our savour that we can by any possibility be reconciled, and to an entire unaptness for the intended and blessed process of seasoning with grace a corrupted world? Alas! if it be so, our hearts are not right with God; and whatever portion of such a spirit there may be in us, it ought to be matter of deep humiliation before him.

(2). A state of inactivity in reference to the conversion of sinners greatly diminishes the value of religious profession, and of religion itself as exhibited among men. It has always been the boast and glory of religion that it has a tendency to spread itself abroad. Hence our blessed Lord compared it to a grain of mustard-seed, which, though the least of all seeds, became a tree; and to leaven, which, though a little of it were hid in three measures of meal, would

extend its influence till the whole was leavened. The same idea is conveyed when he describes his disciples as *light*, and as *salt*; since both these substances are remarkably characterized by a diffusive quality. So eminently has religion borne this character, that it could never have been considered an exaggeration to say, Convert but one man, and you make provision for the conversion of the world. Upon this principle God himself has acted. The conversion of the world is an object which he actually contemplates; but what has he done for it? He has converted some men, and left to them the conversion of others. When this work was to make the most rapid and triumphant progress, namely, after the resurrection of our Lord, the body of converts who were, like the little leaven, to begin it, was extremely small, the number of the names together being but a hundred and twenty; yet such was his reliance upon the diffusive power of religion, that he did not scruple to leave it in their hands. To the same instrumentality he continues to look. Lamentably small as the effect has often been, he still confides in the principle. Of his disciples he has all along said, and he still says, "YE are the salt of the earth;" and from their exertion, if from any quarter, are we still to anticipate the final triumphs of the Gospel.

This, I have said, is the boast and glory of religion, that it is endowed with a vital power, and is adapted to diffuse itself even through a world as corrupt and hostile as this. But, alas! how much is this glory concealed, and this boast invalidated, when professors are slothful! If a man's religion were what it ought to be, there would not long be one convert in a place without his being the means of converting others; but now, in how many places may we see not only one, but several Christians, with no increase of their number, with no change in the general character of their neighbourhood, but rather with a dwindling of the light which has been kindled in them, and an approach to final extinction. Judging from the nature of religion, one would affirm that, if we could place twenty pious people in a town of moderate size, we should make an ample provision for its illumination; yet how often may we see that, in places where there is a much larger number, the cause of Christ seems stationary, if not declining. Might we not be certain that one conversion in a family would lead to more? Yet in how many

instances where several members of a household are pious, how little of its effect is felt by the remainder! Ah, religion! is this thy boasted efficacy? Are these the records of thy glory? Is this the heavenly remedy the power of which was to exceed the virulence of the plague of sin, and to follow it in its universal desolation? What must the quality of that piety be, of which there can be so much in this kingdom, in this town, and in our family circles, with so small an influence?

Beloved brethren, if we have any anxiety to free religion from so unjust and unmerited a reproach, if we have any concern even about the sincerity of our profession, let us be awake to these things. If religion really were not diffusive, it would deserve much less respect from men, and would be held in far lower estimation by God, than it has hitherto enjoyed on the one hand, and claimed on the other. *Salt which has lost its savour is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men:* and religious professors who do not strive to convert the ungodly, are worth lamentably little now, and run a fearful hazard of final rejection.

(3). Negligence of the salvation of others is an unaccountable abandonment of our privilege. The honour and the delight associated with saving a soul from death surely make a very intelligible and powerful appeal to the heart; and it might well have been supposed that, in pursuit of such an object, and in the communication of such benefits, we should have gone forth with joyful zeal. Were any one to authorize us to enter into a scene of distress where, for example, the hungry and the naked, the oppressed and the captive, the sick and the dying, were to be found, to announce a relief for every want, and to carry comfort to every mourner, should we not rejoice to execute the commission? And yet, when God makes us his almoners, and instrumental dispensers of his bounty, we are comparatively sluggish, if not almost unmoved! To which of the condemned sinners around us may we not proclaim a free forgiveness? Which of the hungry poor may we not assure of a welcome to the Gospel feast? To which of the miserable may we not exhibit the Saviour's fulness of grace? Which of the perishing may we not hope to snatch as a brand out of the fire? What, then, is the meaning of our slothfulness? Is it that such deeds as

these yield us no joy? that we count our privilege a task? that we reckon the labour more than the reward? O hearts destitute alike of ambition and of pity! We confess, then, that we disown the luxury of doing good, and desert the station of benefactors of our kind. It is an honour and a joy in which, though they are worthy of the Highest, we have no pleasure. Wishing to increase our felicity, he has caused them to overflow from his own bosom to ours; but we disrelish and repel them. And for what do we refuse them? Are there any pleasures holier or more exalted? None. Is it to be more active in relieving temporal wretchedness? No. He that does most for men's souls will always do most for their bodies. It is merely to sink down into selfishness and indolence; to give ourselves to the world, in its vanities or its cares; and to lead a life which is far more wearisome as it passes, and will be totally fruitless when it is gone.

Yet, no, heavenly Father; we hope not. We have been too insensible to our privilege, but we trust we are not utterly callous to it. Arouse us to deeper feeling, and enable us to work with thee with a heart like thine own!

(4). Negligence of the work of conversion perpetuates the miserable and sinful state of the world. "If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" or how shall it season that to which it is applied? And if the disciples of Christ do not lay themselves out for the conversion of the world, how will it be achieved?

If, in answer to this inquiry, it should be said that the purpose of God will stand, and that if he means to convert the world it will infallibly be done, it would be a truth, but a truth perverted to the purpose of a falsehood. For, as certainly as God has designed the conversion of the world, has he designed also that it shall be achieved by the instrumentality of his people; their agency, therefore, though truly subordinate, is not less necessary than the influence of the Spirit itself. If the world cannot be converted without the one, so neither without the other; just in the same manner that, while God has declared harvest shall not cease, there will be no harvest so long as the world stands if the seed is not sown. As to neglect sowing the seed would destroy the possibility of the harvest, so to withhold Christian exertion prevents the conversion of the world. In whatever sense it

is God's work, his fixed arrangements are such that he not merely will not, he cannot, perform it while his people are inactive. It is by their hands the Bible must be circulated, it is by their lips the Gospel must be preached. Their indolence restrains his action. And, whenever the time may come that he shall arouse himself, and endure this sluggishness no longer, his first effort towards the conversion of the world will be to smite the obdurate hearts of his saints to tears of penitence and tenderness, and to send them forth weeping, bearing at length the precious seed from whence the harvest of immortal joy shall arise.

It may, perhaps, be conceived, that the instrumentality to be employed in the progress of religion is to be chiefly that of ministers and missionaries. Without having any wish to depreciate the office of the ministry, or to diminish its responsibility, I must be allowed to say that I think the sentiment is carried much too far. In the means to be used for the universal prevalence of religion there is much that ministers, with whatever zeal, cannot do—it must be done by private Christians, if done at all; and there is much more which they can do far better than ministers. Besides, would Christ have fitted so many thousands and hundreds of thousands of persons for usefulness in saving sinners without intending to bring them into action, and into a measure of action proportionate to their value? Does he mean that his triumphs should be won by the comparatively small number of his people technically known as ministers? The idea is absurd, and it is falsified by fact. Inquire where it is that the spread of religion partakes most largely of the character of apostolic or millennial days; and you will have for answer, It is in the West Indies and the islands of the Pacific Ocean; where, indeed, they have zealous ministers, but where, too, they have zealous converts. It is in the West Indies, where a single negro, in defiance of his master's wrath (no trifle in a land of slavery), induces four hundred of his companions to hear the Gospel, and has the pleasure of soon seeing forty of them join the church. It is in the isles of the Southern Sea, where men are scarcely converted before they take a boat to a distant isle, and live for nothing but to save their brethren. This is the spirit we want at home: when shall it once be?

The idea that ministers are to be the chief working hands

in a revival might be less injurious, if a less contracted idea were attached to that office. There is nothing limited or professional about the ministry as instituted by Christ. The business of a minister is to preach, or publish, or make known, the Gospel; a business to which every disciple, without exception, is competent, and which the great majority of them would execute, if they would but try, much better than a great number of professional ministers. And the command to preach the Gospel to every creature is addressed to *no portion* of Christ's disciples, but to the whole body, in every age. It is incumbent upon every one of them, male and female, rich and poor, learned and ignorant. A minister's duty is no more than the duty of any other Christian, except by virtue of the circumstances which render his opportunities more ample. Let this be understood, and we have no objection to admit that the preachers of the Gospel are to convert the world.

I confess myself to have a strong conviction, that this is the kind of exertion by which the universal prevalence of Christianity will be achieved; that the present stagnation is to be ascribed to the absence of it; and that the final triumphs wait only for its development. Let the church be converted, and the world will soon be so too. Something, it is true, I admit even that much, has been done, and is doing, for the maintenance and extension of an official ministry; but, in comparison with the number and capability of religious professors, very little is done in the way of personal and individual endeavour. This is infinitely the most valuable of all the aids which can be rendered to the cause of Christ, and would do more good than all the wealth of the Christian or the anti-Christian world. While this is withheld, there is little reason to hope for a blessing on pecuniary contributions, or even to expect that they will long continue to be supplied. The liberality of the present age is eminently the creature of excitement. In order to awaken it, and raise it to its present pitch, recourse has been had to a system of stimulants, in some cases of a very equivocal character, and in many wholly incapable of being perpetuated. Every such effort requires a more pungent excitement than the last; and while the ingenuity required in the invention of them is already almost expended, the result of the system when it ceases must be a proportionate languor and exhaustion. No

pecuniary aids can be permanent but such as are derived with greater ease, but such as arise from the deep emotions of the heart in its intercourse with God, and from a combined sense of duty and of privilege. These springs, it may be feared, afford but a small proportion of the existing liberality of the public; nor can they be opened by any cause but one which will equally induce a habit of individual exertion. Let a man once feel it to be his duty and delight to make the great end of his life, next to his own salvation, the conversion of all around him, and he will then know unbidden what to do with his money, as well as with his influence and his time.

The influence which the method of universal and individual exertion would have in feeding the oft-exhausted and lamenting funds of public societies, is among the least of its benefits. It would be an attitude of consistency and faithfulness upon which the blessing of God might be expected to rest; it would multiply labourers beyond example and beyond computation; it would place them in circumstances inexpressibly eligible for easy and effectual action; and it would cause the power of religion to penetrate the dense mass of society in every direction. It would create the most powerful operation, too, where it has the greatest prospect of success, and where success would be productive of the most beneficial results; for its first achievement would be the conversion of our country, and there is no country with equal capacity for accomplishing the conversion of the world.

But great results cannot arise without the zealous exertion we have enforced. If the salt have lost its savour, the mass cannot be seasoned; and if the followers of Christ, who, collectively and individually, are the salt of the earth, do not labour for the conversion of the world, it will never be achieved. Let but the people of God be inactive, and mankind will still remain in the depraved, the guilty, and the miserable condition which we profess to deplore, and for their deliverance from which we have presented ourselves at the throne of almighty mercy.

What an affecting consideration is this! It is not merely that the prevalence of sin and misery around us will be perpetuated, but that it will be perpetuated by ourselves. We are the destined instruments for its removal, and we become answerable for its continuance. Ask why, at this

late period of the Christian dispensation, the world still lies in wickedness: is it not because the followers of Christ have been indolent and unfaithful? Ask why, after so long a possession of evangelical privileges in England, our favoured country is in so large a measure benighted and irreligious: is it not because British Christians have been negligent and slothful? Ask why this town, with a large heaven of piety for many years, is characterized by such melancholy remnants of ungodliness: is it not because the salt has lost its savour? Or ask, finally, why our domestic and social circles are so ineffectually pervaded by the power of religion: is it not because we ourselves have been wanting in the efforts required at our hands? Alas! for us, who have so many sins of our own, that we should become chargeable with the sins of others! Alas! that we, who profess to grieve over the wickedness of the world, should become accessory to its continuance! O! to wash our hands of this dreadful stain! at least to reprove the works of darkness, and to shine as lights in such a world, holding forth the word of life, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, that their blood may not be required at our hands!

Beloved brethren, I have not set these considerations before you for the mere purpose of exciting your feelings, but I have wished by them to lead you to the contemplation of a material change in the character of your lives; and I implore you to consider whether it exceeds your duty, or will be contrary to your happiness. Our attention has been pointedly called to the stationary aspect of religion at the present period, and we have united in solemn and fervent prayer for a revival: but what revival can we expect, if we do not labour as well as pray? There is assuredly much room for enlargement in both; and, as we have begun with prayer, let us follow it up with practice. Let it be fixed in your hearts that it is for *you, each and every one of you*, young or old, rich or poor, wise or unwise, male or female, to try to convert whatever sinners you may consistently address, with all the vigour you would bestow upon a chief end of life. You who are parents with your children, masters with your servants, tradesmen with your workmen, relations with your relations, and all with your friends, companions, and neighbours: see that you try at all times to save these persons, with more earnestness than you show in conducting your

worldly business, or in labouring for your daily bread. Nothing will make you so happy; nothing short of it will fulfil your duty; nothing less will accelerate the triumphs of the Gospel.

I am not unacquainted with the impediments you will find in the attempt. That which is new always seems to be difficult. You may feel a degree of unaptness in your early efforts, under the influence of which you may imagine that you cannot proceed: or you may perceive your endeavours to fall so far short of what the object demands, that you may be almost constrained to relinquish them as unsuitable. But I can foretell what will embarrass and obstruct you much more. It is a cold and unfeeling heart. Cold and unfeeling, I mean, not in the abstract; for, if you are a Christian, you do feel something for perishing sinners: but in comparison with what you ought to feel. What moment will you find, even in your most sacred hours, and when your spirit is most solemnly impressed with eternal things, in which your pity for dying souls is adequate to their misery, and your resolution to labour for their rescue equal to their woes? But how often will you feel far less warmly than this! Even by the time you reach the family altar the fire in your bosom will glow more feebly, so that the tone of your instructions there will be too low; and when you have been a few hours in the world, when the cares of business have begun to occupy you, or common pursuits to engage your attention, how little will you feel then for the irreligious around you! Should an opportunity of usefulness then occur, how easily may it be overlooked, how negligently passed by! Or how nearly may it become the sentiment of that moment, "I must mind my business, and cannot attend to the salvation of souls!" Ah! brethren, believe me, this will be the grand obstacle to your activity and success. Apply the remedy, therefore, to the root of the evil. Do not enter upon labour, nor even resolve upon it, till your hearts are deeply moved with pity and with love. Let your first step be a visit, and an oft-repeated visit, to the throne of grace, to implore the enlightening and melting influences of the Holy Spirit. Labour first of all to have your heart duly affected with the evil of your own sins, the hateful corruption of your own nature, and the awful perils from which your own soul has been redeemed. Endeavour next to

realize the fact that many of your children, relatives, and friends, are in a similar condition; and contemplate them in it as though you actually saw them in the presence of God, or before his judgment-seat, and sinking into endless perdition. Give him no rest until he makes your heart melt at the sight with the tenderest pity; till he makes you feel that it is your privilege and your obligation to save them, and that all the duties and pleasures of life vanish in comparison with the effort. Then you will be fit to labour; and then I may confidently predict that you *will* labour. O! you will make no excuses then; you will let slip no opportunities; you will hesitate at no sacrifices.

Such a state of mind, perhaps, is far above what you now feel, and in seeking a higher elevation you may find much discouragement, or you may seem to make only larger and more melancholy discoveries of the hardness of your heart. Yet do not despair. A habit is not often changed in a moment; but it may be changed, and it will be changed, by degrees. Think of the importance and excellency of such an alteration; and wait upon the Lord for it with Jacob's importunity, when he said, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

Having attained a measure of a tender spirit, before you commence your exertions take a deliberate view of the field of your labour, and familiarize yourself with the persons, circumstances, and character of those whose welfare you are seeking. Assemble round you in imagination your family group, husband or wife, children or servants; then your labourers, acquaintance, and neighbours. Endeavour to mark those in whom no signs of grace appear; and then concentrate upon them the general compassion you already feel for impenitent sinners. A soul ready to perish is an object touching to you in the abstract; let it now be embodied in the persons of this group in thought before you. Say, This my husband, or this my wife, is a stranger to the Saviour, and in danger of eternal ruin; this my child, these my children, are the children of wrath, and growing up as enemies to God; these my servants are doing the service of sin, the wages of which is death; these my friends and neighbours are in the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity, and the wrath of God abideth on them. Dwell upon this fact till it becomes in your eyes infinitely the most

important feature in their condition, far outweighing all varieties of character and circumstances of temporal good or evil; and then think how much *you* may do for their salvation. Think that every necessary means to convert them is in your hand; that you possess even a divine adaptation to effect it; that God has redeemed you for the very purpose of making you instrumental in converting others; and that you can scarcely fail to labour with success. Next arrange your methods of operation. Think how each may be best approached, and adapt your efforts to varied character and circumstances with deliberation and design. Watch for opportunities, and embrace promptly all which occur to you. Labour for their souls, in a word, as though their salvation were, what it ought to be, superior to all objects for which you live, next to the welfare of your own.

Such being your spirit and your purpose when you enter upon the duties of the day, recall yourself often to the remembrance of it during its progress. Ask yourself at various moments, Am I now cherishing my highest aim, and striving to be useful to those who are in my company? Especially when an opportunity of usefulness appears, remember how important the improvement of it is; that it affords you an answer to prayer, and that it enables you to exert yourself for an object which an angel would rejoice to promote, and for which your Saviour died: and with these recollections lift up your heart to God, that he may quicken you for the effort, and crown it with success.

Next to attaining a tenderness of spirit, nothing is more important or more difficult than preserving it. How soon does it decline, even in circumstances most favourable to its continuance; but amidst the concerns of the world it inevitably sinks. The vagrant heart must be kept in check by constant access to the throne of grace, and by close walking with God. The measure in which our concern for sinners has declined should be a subject of daily examination, and its revival and increase a matter of importunate prayer. Most especially let us be concerned and resolved to leave our closet no morning until our minds are deeply imbued with compassion for sinners, solemnly impressed with our responsibility for the state of those in immediate contact with ourselves, and fully devoted to their spiritual benefit as the highest object of the day. Such a course will not be main-

tained in vain. Religion never declines with us while we are truly unwilling it should do so. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount on wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isa. xl. 31).

To this watchfulness over our spirit, it will be highly important to add a daily examination of our conduct, the true character of which will not be known to us without an attentive review. Let it be the serious business of our evening retirement to inquire, Whom have I attempted to convert to-day? When my eye was resting on my children or servants, my neighbours or friends, who know not God, did a sense of their guilt and misery move me? And to what did it move me? Did I warn and reprove; did I invite and allure them? Did I speak of the Saviour, and commend his ways? Did I say or do anything to infuse into their minds a solemn regard to eternity? Have I done this whenever I ought to have done it this day; towards every person, on every occasion, and with a due solemnity? Ah! brethren, while a professor who never looks closely into his conduct may retain a persuasion that he is nearly or quite without blame on this head, it is impossible but such a scrutiny should convict every one of us of daily sin, and yield us cause for fresh humiliation, and stimulus to more devoted fidelity.

O that the Lord may grant you, beloved brethren, a large measure of a tender spirit! O that your awakening energy may show itself in new and vigorous exertion! Which of you intends to be the cold, the sluggish disciple; the salt which has lost its savour? I will hope and believe that, with one heart and voice, you would answer, NONE. "Wherefore be ye steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. xv. 58).

And now "let thy work appear unto thy servants, O Lord, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it" (Ps. xc. 16, 17).

I cannot close this discourse without addressing myself for a moment to those who know not God. Some of you who are now hearing me do not profess to be disciples of Christ,

or conceive yourselves to be so. You have heard me urging upon the pious friends around you the importance of attempting the conversion of sinners; that is, of attempting *your* conversion. Perhaps the discourse in this respect may have struck you with some surprise. You were not aware that we considered your salvation as of so much moment; none of us have spoken to you concerning it in a manner adapted to convey to you such an idea. We justly bring this reproof upon ourselves. What can be more cutting than the rebuke you thus administer? Forgive us this wrong! But do not suffer our neglect to induce an opinion that your salvation is a trifle. O no! it is of infinite moment. If our conduct has not conveyed this impression to you, yet derive it from the astonishing, and still only proportionate attention which has been paid to it by the Almighty. It engaged his eternal counsels; nay, it induced the gift, and cost the blood, of his Son. And, blessed be his name, it is a benefit which he is infinitely willing to bestow. His mercy is without limitation, and without reluctance. His language is, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28). "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth" (Isa. xlv. 22). "And him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37). Can you turn a deaf ear to an invitation so delightful? Or, if the tones of a mortal voice may add to the eloquence of heaven, permit us to enforce this call with whatever of affectionate concern our cold hearts may feel; and to implore you by the loathsomeness of your corruption, by the magnitude of your guilt, and by your peril of eternal ruin; by the joys of heaven, and by the pains of hell; by the anguish of a dying, and the entreaties of a living, Saviour; by the mercies of a long-suffering God, and the terrors of an avenging Judge, that you receive not the grace of God in vain. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. vi. 2). "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. iv. 7). But "take with you words, and turn unto the Lord, and say unto him, Put away all iniquity, receive us graciously, and love us freely" (Hosea xiv. 2). Amen.

INDIVIDUAL EFFORT
FOR THE
CONVERSION OF SINNERS
ENFORCED, IN A
SERIES OF LECTURES ADAPTED TO PROMOTE
A REVIVAL OF RELIGION.

PREFACE.

THANKS are already due, both to God and to man, for the favourable manner in which the following discourses have been received during the course of their publication, and for the evidence which has been afforded of their present usefulness. With a desire for usefulness, I trust, they have been both delivered from the pulpit and sent forth from the press; and, if it is delightful to know that my labour is already not unrewarded, it is more so to hope that an ample recompense remains.

What, indeed, could be expected, but that an effort, however humble, to promote a revival of religion should meet with a favourable regard among sincere Christians, more especially in an age, like the present, of pre-eminent activity? It is my joy to sink myself in my object; and to believe that the encouragement afforded me has arisen far less from the merit of the effort I have made, than from a just estimate of the aim I have taken.

The question has nevertheless forced itself upon me with considerable power, whether a revival of religion, a speedy and rapid extension of the work of conversion, is ardently desired by professing Christians at large.

It might be deemed far from hazardous to assume the affirmative of this question as a fact; and, indeed, when we consider what religion is, it seems difficult to admit the possibility of the negative. It has accordingly been assumed, and this assumption has characterized all the measures which have been taken in relation to the object. Hence the appointment of meetings for prayer; meetings, that is to say, for the expression of desire. Hence the preaching and the printing of sermons, and other kindred exertions, to point out the means of religious revivals. No one, I hope, will imagine that I mean to censure or to depreciate these things; I am

only saying that the measures adopted have gone on the supposition that desire existed, and that it existed in due force, requiring only to be expressed in supplication, and directed in action.

I may be asked, perhaps, whether I think this was incorrectly, or too hastily, assumed; and whether the immediate answer to the summons to prayer, crowded as were the places of worship and apparently fervent as were the supplications, together with the rapid sale (if the sale was rapid) of the productions on the subject which issued from the press, did not establish the assumption as a fact. To this I cannot hesitate to answer, that, making the largest estimate of all pleasing indications, and a much larger estimate of them than my personal observation would warrant, I do not conceive that a speedy and rapid extension of the work of conversion is by any means ardently desired by professing Christians at large.

Lest it should be supposed that I am thus exalting myself above my brethren, I may here say, that I feel myself deeply chargeable with the common guilt. If I do desire multiplied conversions at all, it is in a degree very far from being commensurate with their inestimable value. I cannot doubt but there are many who in this respect greatly excel me. Would to God my cold heart were solitary in the world! But that an ardent desire for the enlarged conversion of sinners is not extensively characteristic of the age is manifest from no equivocal signs.

Somewhat more than two years ago a revival of religion, partaking more or less of the character of those with which some parts of the United States had been favoured, was a general topic of conversation, both among ministers and private Christians, and the public mind seemed to undergo a strong excitement. Where is that excitement now? What was its character while it lasted? What have been its fruits?

It may be affirmed without hazard, that, at present, no *general* excitement respecting revivals exists. An indifference to the thing itself is clearly indicated by the growing, and now almost entire, disuse of the term, as though it were not merely obsolete, but disagreeable. The excitement itself is, too justly, looked upon as a thing gone by, and, perhaps with justice too, as a fit of religious frenzy, a mere temporary and

transient interruption of the habitual temperature—with some, the habitual soberness—of English piety. All things are now returned to their former sedateness, unless it be here and there a minister, or a few individuals in here and there a church, who prolong the almost hopeless effort of cherishing and propagating the fire.

But what was this excitement while it lasted? I conceive decidedly enthusiastic. Not, indeed, that in all cases there was even enthusiasm. The prayer-meetings of the tenth of November, 1828, were crowded, not because all who attended were inflamed with desire for a revival, but because some would assemble at any time at the call of their ministers, because others were in the habit of going with the multitude, and because many more wished to see what such unusual meetings would be, or would produce. The show was fair. But persons of discriminating judgment and extensive information perceived clearly that the spirit was not generally satisfactory, and that the results would not be considerable. The secret of revivals, they said at the time, did not lie in such meetings. Accordingly it was, in many cases, long before a similar exercise was attempted; the country waited for London, and London waited for the stimulus of the press; and the second set of prayer-meetings have not, I believe, in any respect, generally equalled the first. A state of feeling derived from realizing views of eternal things would have been, not merely of permanent, but of increasing power. This was the blaze of thorns. At its very kindling the flame consumed the whole strength of its nutriment, and left for future endeavours only the stirring of the expiring embers.

What, finally, have been the fruits of the excitement we have witnessed? Blessed be God, it is not altogether fruitless. Some individuals, both public and private, are much more devoted and active. But there is no general result of a beneficial kind. On the whole the tone of the ministry is not altered, nor the established modes of exertion, nor the habits of the people, either as it respects feeling or action. After the first prayer-meetings there was no general spirit of self-reproof and repentance for personal neglect, no wide-spreading aspect of reform. It may be feared, even, that there was not generally any vigorous discipline of the heart, or attempted enlargement of desire or of supplication. To

this day there is so little of these things, that the state of religion among us is not, on the whole, perceptibly different from what it was before. It is doubtful whether the partial fruit which yet appears will remain, insulated and wondered at as laborious devotedness is in the present state of the church.

Throughout the whole period of this now evanescent excitement, there appears to have prevailed a very material misconception of the nature of the object by the name of which it had been produced. A religious revival was by no means regarded as a state *in ourselves* of unusually deep concern respecting eternal things, of great searching and humbling of heart before God, of penetrating grief for the condition of our fellow-men, and of new exertion in every method for their conviction and transformation, these exercises being productive of the desired effects on the ungodly; but rather as an operation which should take place among irreligious persons *apart from ourselves*. It was something we expected to see, rather than to do. We counted upon being spectators, and not actors. Hence we went to prayer in crowds. We besieged the heavenly throne from morning till night, calling upon God to come forth from his rest, and to take his hand from his bosom; but, when we found that this did not bring the expected result, but that the scenes for which we had been longing, or seeming to long, required the breaking of our own hearts, the bursting of our slothful bands, the mortifying of our pride and the opening of our lips, immediately our ardour cooled. *That* was not the thing which we had desired; nor indeed was it that which we were willing to encounter. Rather than encounter it, accordingly, the very appearance and profession of desire after a revival of religion is relinquished and disowned.

If the recent excitement on the subject of revivals do not authorize the belief that a great acceleration in the work of conversion is ardently desired by the religious world, still less evidence of such a state of feeling can be derived from a view of its previous and ordinary condition.

I believe it is very far from being a general opinion, that the work of conversion is in any considerable degree stationary, or even slow; and those who do admit this as a fact are far from regarding it generally with any just intensity of grief. It seems to be held, on the contrary, that, with the

exception of a few declining congregations, the diffusion of pure and undefiled religion is going on very satisfactorily, if not very delightfully; and, when stress is laid on the small number of conversions compared with the multitudes of the irreligious, the force of the means employed, the magnitude of the work to be achieved, and the splendour of the prospects to be realized, instead of stirring the heart to agonizing longings, the influence of all such considerations is for the most part nullified by saying, either that there is much cause for thankfulness, or that things are much better than they were, or that we must not look too much at the dark side, or that we must wait the Lord's time, or some such oracular nothings. Do I then call in question the truth and the wisdom of these replies? I question neither; but I reprobate the purpose for which they are employed. With all their truth and wisdom, to the case in hand they are nothing; and for the most part they are meant to serve no purpose, but to allay or to prevent the vigorous, and somewhat painful, excitement of the mind which a just regard to the state of the world would produce. I make no objection to the influence of these soothing topics, if due power is also allowed to stimulant ones. But if this is affirmed to be generally the case, I ask where are the evidences of it? Will any observer of the religious world affirm that there is as much of bitterness indulged over souls that die, as there is of at least seeming joy over those that repent; that there is as much of grief for the dishonour now done to God, as there is of acquiescence in his supposed will that the triumphs of his Gospel should be delayed; or that there is as much of stirring up the heart to pity, as there is of soothing it into peace? Where are the fruits which must infallibly result from such a process and state of mind as these? I speak not now of individuals, but of the church at large; and in this reference I ask, Where are the tears which every Christian sheds over the guilt and misery of his neighbour, or the zeal with which he is saying to his fellow, Know thou the Lord? I ask again, whether the great majority of professors are not manifestly negligent of such exertions; and whether they do not question, evade, dislike, or disregard, all pressing exhortations to activity. And, in the face of these things, is it to be maintained that there exists generally an ardent desire for an enlarged work of conversion? It is impossible. If there

is anything characteristic in human conduct, or any force in evidence, it is obvious that the general feeling is one of prevailing satisfaction with the state of religion as it is.

This conclusion is a deeply painful one. How criminal is such a state! How mischievous! How little vigour does it indicate in existing piety! How little does it promise for its rapid diffusion! How inconsistent with our profession, as well as with the magnificence of our religious societies, and the boasted liberality and zeal of the age! How much it should be the concern of every one of us to remedy so great an evil! And how imperative it is upon all who wish to accelerate the progress of religion, to bear upon this mischief with the whole force of divine and transforming truth!

But, while I take this afflictive view of the temper of Christians at large, I rejoice to know and to acknowledge that there are some, and that in the whole their number is not small (though, being scattered through various churches and various denominations, they make no appearance as a body), whose hearts are truly, though, as they will most readily own, far from proportionately, alive to the conversion of sinners. The aboundings of iniquity touch them with compassion, and awake them to prayer; and it is they who welcome every contribution to the object they desire. May this volume be made to them a blessing!

It may perhaps surprise such readers that I have confined myself, in the following discourses, to the single recommendation of *individual effort* for the conversion of sinners.

Upon a moment's consideration, however, it will be obvious, both that such exertions are directly adapted to the end we wish to attain, and that they constitute the most immediate and natural means of pursuing it. They ought, also, to be both easy and delightful, congenial as they are with all the feelings of the renewed heart, and identified with the sources of its highest pleasures. I am aware, nevertheless, that exhortations of this kind do not always find so warm a welcome as might be anticipated for them. They enforce more exertion, they lead to more difficulty, than even a devoted mind is always prepared for. They interfere too much with habits of quietness and ease, they are connected with too many risks, or perhaps certainties, of disagreeable accompaniments, to engage an instant and unhesitating acquiescence. Hence

the possibility, and I am sorry to say not the possibility only, of their being questioned or objected to. Can individual exertions be so necessary, or so important? May not the end be attained without them? Can they justly claim such pre-eminent importance as is attached to them in the following discourses? Is not what is more wanted *an outpouring of the Holy Spirit*, in order to make the means now employed more amply successful?

It must be readily admitted, that, if the influence of the Spirit were largely effused, the means now employed for the conversion of sinners, taking the preaching of the Gospel alone, might and would be productive of far more extensive effects. Such an effusion, therefore, should be most earnestly and constantly implored. But should this be all? Or, if this be all we do, can we expect it should succeed? Is prayer for the Holy Spirit likely to be successful, unless it is accompanied by a diligent use of the means in our power for the accomplishment of the same end? In what light can the heart-searching God regard a person who, while loudly calling for the Spirit to convert sinners, uses no effort to instruct and to persuade them himself? Could any man think himself sincere in such supplications? And must not the character of insincerity inevitably attached to them render them in the eyes of the Almighty, if not offensive, at least uninfluential?

It may occur to the reader to ask why the concern which, of late years, has been pre-eminently cultivated for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, has not been followed by an ample measure of the supplicated blessing. Without affirming that no answer has been given to prayer, or that nothing can be ascribed to the sovereignty of God or the unripeness of his plans, it may be worth inquiry whether the inconsistencies of prayer may not have rendered it unacceptable and unavailing. The case of the Israelites who were clamorous for good harvests while they did not bring the required portion into the sanctuary, in its principle is justly applicable to ourselves. We are importunate for the effusion of the Spirit, but we will not work. What then is more natural, or more just, than that the Lord should say, "Since you will not labour, you shall have no rain. Treat me differently, and I will be more bountiful to you. Show me that you are in earnest by being consistent. While you urge me to do

what lies with me, do what lies with yourselves. Say every man to his neighbour, Know the Lord ; and *try me herewith*, and see if I will not pour you out a blessing, so that there shall not be room enough to contain it."

There is the more ground to apprehend such an obstructive influence, because the reason why prayer is separated from labour is exclusively evil. It is not that means or opportunities are wanting, but that we have no heart to improve them. We cannot resolve upon the discipline of ourselves, or the importunity with others, which the voice of God demands. We are too much in love with our own ease and indulgence, with our reputation and comfort, to bring them to the sacrifice, or even to put them to the hazard. We shrink from imperative duty, and repel or evade the motives which enforce it. To make amends for our sloth, we betake ourselves to prayer. We think, or at least we endeavour to persuade ourselves, that prayer will be sufficient. We will lay an extraordinary stress upon the influence of the Spirit, if it may but exonerate us from the necessity of personal toil. Can anything be more absurd in itself, or more provoking to our Maker? Does he intend the outpouring of his Spirit to save us the trouble—I should rather say to supersede our privilege—of labouring for him? Or can he ever bestow it in recompense of a temper which hates industry, and will sow no seed, though repining at the scantiness of the harvest?

Besides the importance, therefore, which may be justly attached to individual effort in itself, I conceive it is peculiarly needed to complete and render successful all other kinds of exertion. It is that one thing which is yet wanting to evince our sincerity, and to establish our consistency. Then will our efforts prevail more extensively, both with God and with man ; but, I speak from deep conviction, *never till then*.

Well satisfied of the importance of the object, I am sensible of the feeble and imperfect execution, of the work which I now send before the public. Upon one point only, however, will I make an observation. It may be thought that too much of a controversial strain pervades the following discourses. My reply is, that I have acted herein under a sense, not of duty merely, but of necessity. The things which hinder the exertions I have wished to enforce are, in

a great measure, mistaken doctrinal views. This kind of impediment is plainly not to be overcome by any intensity of pathos, or urgency of appeal. Should any influence at all be produced by such means, it could only be enthusiastic and transient, while the counteracting views entertained could not fail to regain and to perpetuate their sway. It is necessary to instruct and to convince, and therefore to argue; to expose fallacies, and to establish truth. And this is the more necessary, because, while truth is the only source from which lasting good can arise, it is one of the most grievous features of our present slothfulness that it arises out of our very religious tenets, and becomes a part of our religion itself. The light which is in us is darkness; the very state which our divine Lord has exhibited as more afflictive and hopeless than any other.

For the rest, I have only to say, would to God the volume were far more worthy of the blessed cause to which it is devoted! Would to God that the discourses had been delivered and written under a deeper sense of the importance of the subject, and a larger experience of the power of the truths I have enforced! No person more needed these discourses to be preached to him than myself; and no person at this moment stands more severely reprov'd by them. Most strange indeed does it appear to me that I can have said and have written these things, and still be what I am. If any of my readers find in them anything touching or important, anything instructive or edifying, let them at least recompense me with their prayers that what is blessed to them may be a blessing also to me, and that he who has been a helper to them in ways of devotedness to God may not come short, either of its present toils or its future reward.

READING, *Jan. 14, 1831.*

LECTURE I.

THE STATE OF THE WORLD AROUND US.

“I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.”—*Jeremiah* viii. 6.

THE object which I have designed to promote by this and some following services is a revival of religion in this place; or, in other words, a great and speedy increase in the conversion of sinners to God. The importance and excellence of this object every true Christian will acknowledge, together with, I presume, the seasonableness of the present effort, at a time when the attention of the churches has been drawn towards a revival of religion with a measure of more especial regard. I have repeatedly expressed my conviction, both here and elsewhere, that, in order to the attainment of this object, there must be produced among Christians generally a far greater degree of concern and activity than at present exists; that when the church awakes the world will be awakened, and not till then. It is not necessary now to argue this point, which probably none of you seriously doubt; it is enough to say that the present course of Lectures has been projected upon this principle. You will readily, therefore, understand their design, and appreciate their character. In order to promote the conversion of sinners I am not about to appeal to the ungodly themselves, but to you who have known the power of Almighty grace. I am about to expostulate, not with the wicked, but with the righteous, and to urge every one of you to labour for the conversion of his neighbour. You must expect, throughout, a direct and urgent bearing upon your own feelings and conduct. In this respect there will be no variety; but, to whatever other objects we may turn for a moment, our principal intention will be to induce in you, dear Christian brethren, a more lively concern and more strenuous activity for the salvation of men. If you love appeals of such a character, and are

willing to yield your hearts to their influence, then listen and consider. We do not proceed on the supposition that you have hitherto felt and done *nothing* for so blessed an object; but upon the fact, which will be on every hand acknowledged, that we have all felt and done *far too little*. It is high time that our feelings and our labours were more proportionate; and God grant that this humble effort may be blessed to the production of so happy a result!

The subject we take up this evening is THE STATE OF THE WORLD AROUND US; obviously the first which requires our notice, inasmuch as it is the basis of our whole argument: nor can our minds be duly affected by it without a measure of clear and accurate knowledge. In order to illustrate the state of things around us I have selected the words of the text, which were uttered by the prophet Jeremiah in the name of the Lord, at a period when the Israelitish nation was pre-eminent in crime, and on the verge of proportionate calamities. Let us, in the first place, notice the condition described, and then inquire how far a similar description might be applied to those amidst whom we live.

I. Let us briefly notice *the condition which the prophet describes*; "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle."

1. Here had been *the commission of wickedness*; as is plainly implied in the declaration that no man *repented* of it. We know accordingly that, at this period of their history, the crimes of the Israelites were great, and afflictive enumerations of them may be seen in many parts of the prophetic writings.

2. Here was *a refusal to repent*. "No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" We understand from these words that they had received a call to repent, and had been favoured with an opportunity of doing so; of which, indeed, the repeated messages of the prophets, and the long forbearance of their God, afford multiplied and affecting proofs. But all had been fruitless; "no man repented him of his wickedness."

3. Here was *a determined and reckless perseverance in sin*. "Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." At the voice which called them to repentance

they paused for a moment; but they listened only to disregard, and they immediately returned to the iniquities which they had been summoned to renounce. "Every one turned to his course." Wrath, indeed, was before them, but they heeded it not. As the horse which has been trained to war, in defiance of all its array of terror and destruction, "rusheth into the battle," so did these guilty men hurry forward in their course of wickedness, reckless of all the judgments which God in pity had foretold, and was about to execute in wrath.

II. Such was the melancholy state of a remote people in a distant age. *Shall we find any resemblance to it in present times, and in the favoured spot of our own habitation?* I limit myself in this inquiry to the place of *our own* abode, not because I think it differs materially from other portions of our country, but because it is *here*, if anywhere, that we ourselves must be active; it is therefore with the character of this spot that we should be more especially acquainted. How far, then, is the language of the text applicable to our immediate residence?

1. We begin by acknowledging, with the utmost joy and gratitude to God, that *it is far from being universally so*. All, indeed, have sinned; but some have also repented, and have found mercy. Some, I trust, are even now repenting; and could we, like one above, hearken to the secret breathings of the heart, or observe the retreats of solitary piety, we should hear, perhaps, not a few *speaking aright*, and saying, with a melting and a broken heart, "What have I done?" Are not *some of you*, dear hearers, of this number? Have not *your* sorrows inspired some of the melody of that glorious heaven, in which there is joy over every sinner that repenteth?

2. It will be readily acknowledged, however, on the other hand, that the language of the text *is not wholly inapplicable* to the population which surrounds us. It is not *every man* "who repents him of his wickedness;" some, alas! too manifestly refuse the call of eternal mercy, and "turn every one to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle."

3. What is most important for us, however, is to ascertain, with some probable correctness, *to what extent* such a state of things may exist. Have the great majority of our neighbours and fellow-townsmen repented them of their wickedness,

leaving only the few going on in their trespasses? Or is the population in this respect almost equally divided? Or, finally, is the greater number to be ranked among those who "speak not aright"?

Let it not be imagined that the institution of such an inquiry proceeds upon the assumption of either the power or the right to summon our fellow-creatures to the bar of our judgment. God is the only judge, and before his bar may we all stand with acceptance! But there are fruits by which character is manifested, and by which every man, like every tree, must be content to be estimated. Every tree is as its fruit is, and by its fruit it *may* be known. Neither let it be supposed that we derive any pleasure from forming a low opinion of the character of others. On what principle can it yield us gratification to think that our neighbours and friends are in a state of guilt and misery? How would not our hearts rejoice to know that, not only some, but all of them were Christians indeed! Our estimate shall be formed with the utmost stretch of charity which the scriptural standard will allow, and an unfavourable conclusion be admitted only as an unwelcome one, and when forced upon us by convincing proofs. We acknowledge, however, that we cannot avoid the conviction, nor, entertaining it, can we suffer ourselves to conceal or to disguise it, that it is not the few but the many, the great majority of the inhabitants of this town, to whom the word of the Lord by Jeremiah must be applied: "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle."

Will not observation confirm this conclusion? Hearken and hear. Who speaks aright, or repenteth him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Take any portion you please of this town, and ask every person in it who is capable of giving you a sufficient answer what he thinks about his iniquities, and what he feels about them,—how many of them will even *say* that they know anything of a broken heart and a contrite spirit? Station yourself in a great thoroughfare, or in the place of concourse, with a similar inquiry, or propose it to the whole number of persons whom you may chance to see in the course of a day's intercourse with the world: and what do you think would be the result?

Do any of us suppose that the average number of true penitents would exceed one in ten of the grown population?

Or judge by the fruits. Look around you, and observe the generally prevailing ungodliness of the place. What multitudes are sunk in vice! What multitudes more are devoted to the world! How many are votaries of pleasure! How many are abandoned to levity! And what movement is there in this mass of iniquity? Whose countenance is sad? Whose sins are forsaken? Whose worldliness is renounced? Whose levity is banished? Where are the reformed lives, the characters renewed? Are the public-houses becoming empty? Is the play-house deserted? Is the dance abandoned? Is the card-table thrown aside? Are the vicious, the gay, and the thoughtless, in crowds pricked to the heart, and crying "What must we do to be saved?" We know which answer to these questions would be most gratifying; but which is most true? Is it not that few, very few, a mere fraction of our many thousands, give any signs of a transformed character, or a repentant heart?

And what is to hinder such a conclusion? *Are we to be told that, in this country, all are Christians; and that persons distinguished by national religious privileges, and in their baptism made children of God, members of Christ, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, are not to be spoken of as though THEY could be among the wicked?* We proclaim it to be a most entire and dangerous delusion. We answer it in the words of our Lord upon a similar occasion: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Christians are not made by geographical boundaries, or ritual performances. Nothing makes a Christian which does not transform the heart. "And now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees, and every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."

Are we to be told that regularity in religious observances is sufficient to exempt persons from the charge of impenitence in sin? As though the form of godliness could avail anything, when it is used only as a cloak to conceal the absence of its power! "God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Few things can be more astonishing than the complacency with which formalists

practise a fraud upon themselves, and wrap themselves round in a veil which the eye of God at once penetrates, and the assumption of which he can regard only as an insult and a mockery.

Are we to be told, that an unblamable character and a decent morality establish an indisputable title to the Christian name? What! when the heart is all the while devoted to the world, and in enmity with God? No. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new." "The friendship of the world is enmity with God."

To whatever reductions our estimate may be liable, it is not to be affected by such pretences as these. An appeal to the scriptural standard of piety will instantly sweep them away; and, if they be the pretexts under which any of our fellow-townsmen are sheltering themselves from present conviction, we know that such refuges of lies will yield them no protection from final ruin!

III. Having traced the extent to which the words of the prophet may be applied to our immediate residence, let us now proceed to observe *the affecting features of the case which lies before us*. Out of the ten thousand persons who may be fairly comprehended in the calculation (five thousand being allowed for those of tender age), here are probably not less than eight or nine thousand of whom it must be said, "They speak not aright: no man repenteth him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle."

1. The first affecting feature of this case is its *deep criminality*. I would say, its *wickedness*, were it not that this word has come to be applied chiefly to the grosser sins from which many are exempt: this, however, is an entire departure from the scriptural practice, according to which the term *wickedness* is applied to the most refined as well as the most profligate iniquities.

The case, I have said, is one of deep and affecting criminality. It is not a little to say that these our fellow-townsmen *have, in fact, been transgressors against God*. God is their Maker, and they ought to have loved him with all their hearts; yet, instead of this, they have set themselves up against him in an attitude of determined self-will and resistance. They have shown themselves enemies to their Maker,

and herein have manifested a disposition most awfully evil. It violates and repels the most righteous obligation; in a similar case among men it would be visited with universal execration; it is the very temper which induced the rebellion of the angels of light, and which actuates them now they have fallen.

Yet this is but a small part. They have not only committed iniquity, but *they refuse to repent of it*. The voice of the Lord calls—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon." Yet "they speak not aright: no man repenteth him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" O! if, having rebelled against the Most High, their hearts were broken at the recollection of it; if they were hastily availing themselves of the proclamation of mercy, and pouring out their lamentations in the presence of forgiving love; then, indeed, would *our* griefs vanish in the midst of *theirs*, and we should speak no more of the guilt of those who had begun to condemn themselves. But we have to behold a very different spectacle. "No man repenteth him of his wickedness." No man's heart is generous enough to avail himself of an opportunity of frankly confessing his crime; nor is any tender enough to urge him even to escape from its consequences. This is a heavy aggravation of the case. What hardness of heart it discovers! Do not our friends know that evil is before them? Have they never heard that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men? And is it with such a prospect they lull themselves into slumber; or are they so deeply fascinated with sin that, for the sake of it, they think it worth while to perish for ever. Melancholy infatuation! And yet more melancholy criminality! It is the love of sin that produces the neglect of repentance. They have no wish to acknowledge it even though it would be forgiven, because they are determined not to forsake it. They have the opportunity of cancelling it from the divine records, but they prefer that it should stand against them. It is a second choice of their former sins, and is far more criminal than the first, because they have now full opportunities of deliberation and recall. Yet they choose sin; and, "every one turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." It is

nothing to them that their Maker deserves their obedience, and is ungratefully dishonoured by their rebellion; it is nothing to them that his arm is uplifted in vengeance, yet stayed by interposing mercy; that that mercy calls, and waits, and calls again; that it has been exercised in the humiliation and the anguish of the Son of God; that its appeals are seconded by all that is just in reproof, tender in loving-kindness, or dreadful in indignation; all this is nothing to them, nor that this almost incredible solicitation should be continued year after year, in defiance of their perpetual provocation: "every one turneth to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle."

Verily, wickedness of the most aggravated description is here. O look not for it in the riot of the sensual, in the loathsomeness of the drunkard, in the curses of the profane; behold it rather in that desperate love of sin which renders the ear deaf, and the heart callous, to the solicitations of condescending mercy. This is wickedness which, so far as the ways of God are open to us, has no parallel. In rebellion against their Maker men have companions, though fearful ones, for devils have done the same; but in repelling the entreaties of forgiving love they stand alone on a melancholy pre-eminence of crime, gazed at with scarcely less amazement by the wicked than by the good of other worlds, and probably never to be equalled by any. And is it not a very touching circumstance that the population around us, with whatever may be amiable, or virtuous, or refined, should be of such a character as this? If the eight or nine thousand whom we are now contemplating were under the influence of mental disease only, it would be deeply affecting; but how much more when the heart itself is depraved by a determined love of sin! If we were in the midst of a city whose inhabitants were *murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers*, it would harrow up every feeling of the heart; but how much more should such an effect be produced by living among those who are at enmity with their Maker, and in deadly strife at once against his authority and his love!

2. A second affecting feature in the case before us is its *awful misery*: for sin and misery can never be disjoined.

Sin itself is misery. It turns men away from all the sources of real happiness, and leads them in pursuit of trifles and shadows, if not of more substantial mischiefs. Their

delights are vain and unsatisfying; their disappointments are numerous and severe; and the brave boast of the worldling uniformly terminates in the bitter acknowledgment, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." Even now, therefore, our thoughtless fellow-townsmen are not happy, even for a moment.

But, if sin is identified with misery in the present life, much greater misery follows it. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men." He is not an idle spectator of their iniquities, but records them all in the book of his remembrance, against the day when every one of us must appear before his tribunal. Sentence of condemnation is denounced against every transgressor, even "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." But, if this be the case with *sin simply considered*, how greatly aggravated must the punishment of *impenitence* be, and of impenitence in the midst of such abundant and long-continued privileges, every one of which heightens the criminality of the sinner, and the righteous displeasure of his Judge!

But what is this condemnation? Alas! who knoweth? In order to represent it the Sacred Scriptures say very awful things; as when they compare it to "a lake burning with fire and brimstone, the smoke of whose torment ascendeth up for ever and ever:" and yet, if it were nothing more than this, the wrath to come would be easily borne. For fire touches only the body; the anger of God penetrates the heart. Oh! the world of future sorrow contains no fire, save the inward sense of Almighty indignation, which this raging element is employed to represent, while it falls infinitely short of expressing that intensity of woe. The anguish of another world is, like all its objects, such as "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived." And this is the state which endures for ever! From that bed of agony there is to be no rising, and on it there can be no repose; but the whole remainder of an interminable existence is to be consumed in ceaseless, resistless, and unutterable pangs.

See then, dear friends, the actual condition of those who surround you. Is it not dreadful beyond utterance, and beyond comparison? Is it not adapted to arouse your deepest anxieties, and your tenderest griefs?

It presents to you everything which moved the pity of the Most High. In the case of a fallen world he saw nothing more than the criminality and misery which are distinctly exhibited to you; and, in defiance of his just and awakened wrath, this sight inspired his compassion. "God so loved the world as to give his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We have everything, therefore, to touch *our* hearts which touched *his*; and is the spectacle to produce on us no similar effect? Nay, we have more. The compassion of God was excited towards men by less than half of that which now appeals to ours; for he had to contemplate only the transgression of his law—we behold the rejection of his mercy, which involves criminality and leads to destruction far more awful. Contemplating more than double, therefore, of that sin and misery which moved the Most High to pity, are we to show ourselves unmoved? Do we mean thus to set the brand of folly on the tenderness of his disposition on behalf of our guilty race, and to teach him that it was as needless for him to pity us as we find it to compassionate others? Or is it that, while we profess to be his people, we wish to make it manifest that we have no feelings in common with himself, and no sympathy in his works and purposes of love?

Consider, too, *who they are* that are thus awfully situated. If we had heard of such a state of things in some distant world, as in any of the orbs of light which roll above our heads, it should have awakened an unaffected grief; but, if it had been on any portion of our wretched globe, though in an island of the remotest sea, this would have made it a matter of more immediate interest. It *is*, however, of far nearer concern than this. The persons thus criminal and miserable are the very inhabitants of the spot on which we live. They are our neighbours, our acquaintances, our friends: they are, in many cases, our relatives, our husbands or our wives, our parents or our children. They are the persons with whom we are on terms of respect and esteem, and in perpetual intercourse of kindness; with whom we are sharing the bounties of providence and the innocent pleasures of life; with whom we are connected by a thousand social and domestic ties, which bind us together as in a universal brotherhood; with whom, in many instances, we

are in habits of most intimate familiarity, and from whom we draw the most endearing delights, and the most important benefits. Is it to *their* condition we are insensible? Or can we show a lively sensibility to their temporal sufferings, with a heart hardened against their spiritual and eternal woes?

Besides, let us ask *how long* they will be here? *While here*, we acknowledge that the fulness of their misery does not come. But it is only the respite of the condemned: and how long will it be continued? It is but to die, and they fall into hell. It is but for the brittle thread of life to be cut, and they sink instantly into the everlasting sorrows of which we have been speaking. And this *may be*—to-morrow—to-day. When may it not be? It is taking place continually around us, with persons of every rank and of every age. Our neighbours and fellow-townsmen *are actually sinking into hell every day* before our eyes; and it will not be long before all we now look upon, if they continue in sin, will also exchange the luxury and the gaiety, the comfort and the kindness, of their present circumstances, for the sorrows of that place of torment where a drop of water will be asked for in vain.

Tell me then, dear friends, what our feelings ought to be upon this subject? Every case of suffering makes an appeal to your compassion. What should you feel, or what would you do, if you saw as many of your fellow-townsmen perishing in hunger and nakedness? How would you feel or act if as many of them were under sentence of death, and yet consuming their few days of respite in riotous mirth and a determined repetition of their crimes, although an application for mercy would secure their pardon? Just in the same way feel and act in reference to their souls, only in due proportion to the magnitude of their misery. No rule can be more fair. But can we bear its application? *Do we feel any proportionate concern for the spiritual state of our neighbours, or make any corresponding efforts?* Where are the tears we shed over their impenitence and ruin? Here are the torrents of iniquity running down our streets! But where are the rivers of water which should be flowing from our eyes? What weighty burthen of grief on this account lies on our hearts? What deep importunity of prayer does the prevailing ungodliness inspire? When are we found

warning the vicious, instructing the ignorant, unravelling the sophistries of the infidel, or opening the eyes of the self-deceived? In a word, with how much of diligence, constancy, and earnestness, are we employing the various means in our power of saving souls from death? What would be said if we treated the temporal sorrows of men in the same way that we do their eternal woes? To imagine that you are *all* indolent in this respect would be dreadful indeed, and I rejoice in knowing that this is not the case. But are *none* of you indolent? Have not some of you hitherto lived in an entire and most unchristian insensibility and sloth, in reference to the unhappy persons who are perishing around you? And which of us have felt and laboured as we ought,—as devotedly, as arduously, as solemnly, as eternity and the souls of men deserve? For myself, I confess frankly that I have not. Oh! there is an awful character about the criminality and approaching destruction of these sinners which we are all of us far from realizing in its full extent; and in comparison with which the utmost that we feel or do deserves not even to be named. When shall it be otherwise? Do we mean to continue in so deep and sinful a slumber? Are we about to perpetuate what we cannot justify? And shall the guilt and woes of our fellow-creatures hastening to eternal pains still glare on us reproachfully for the miraculous tranquillity in which we live, while they sink unheeded into the second death? Let all that is tender, let all that is Christian, let all that is human forbid!

If you ask me *how* the existing and long-cherished apathy shall be overcome, I have no difficulty in giving you an answer. Look steadfastly upon the spectacle before you. Realize it *as a fact*, that out of every ten persons you meet, eight or nine upon an average are enemies to God, contempters of Christ, and in the highway to hell; and that in the very town in which you live there are eight or nine thousand such. Let this idea be brought before your minds again and again, and be held there with fixed attention, till it acquires with you the reality and influence of a fact; and it is impossible but it must work upon the heart. Little good, indeed, will result from any of these services, if the hearing of the preacher be separated from such individual exercises of reflection. O! I hope, dear friends, you have not intended to divide the public from the private means of improvement.

You have not designed to listen to God's truth in *his* house, without giving it proportionally a more serious consideration in *your own*. You will not refuse me this one request, which I make not less for your good than for the success of my own labour, that, after every one of these discourses, you will devote at least one half-hour to serious reflection on the subject which has been laid before you. Be assured you will not find it in vain. Difficultly moved as the heart is, inconsideration is its only shield from the great and all-powerful influence of truth. What special causes may be in operation to prevent or to diminish the effect of such a heart-rending case as I have this evening exhibited to you, it is not for me to enter upon now; in the course of these Lectures they will come more properly under review. At present I only say to you, *Dwell upon these facts with the deep and constant attention which you acknowledge them to deserve; and you will speedily both feel more acutely, and labour more devotedly.*

I may not close this discourse without saying a few words to those of you, dear friends, who have not yet sought after your salvation. The Lord has "hearkened and heard," but he has not heard you "speaking aright," nor has he found you "repenting of your wickedness, saying, What have I done?" but you have hitherto "turned to your course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." You have observed how strong an appeal your criminal character and wretched condition make to the compassion of others; does it make none to your own? Are you the persons in whom these wicked dispositions prevail, and on whom there hangs this tremendous wrath, and have you no pity for yourselves? Is it really nothing to you that you have a Maker whom you dishonour, and a Saviour whom you despise; that your character is allied to that of infernal spirits, and your doom on the very eve of being far more dreadful than theirs? Has it no power to move you that the Son of God should stretch out his dying arms, and beseech you to be reconciled lest you perish?

Was ever rebel courted so,
In groans of an expiring God?

Say not that it is new to you to be addressed in such a manner, or that, if your case is really so melancholy, your friends ought to have pitied you before. We acknowledge that we ought to have done so, and our apathy has been

inexcusable; but we beseech you not to draw from our neglect a pretext for your own ruin. The fact is, not that the description we now give of your case is at all worse than the reality, but that we, together with yourselves, have most criminally slept over it. It is high time that we should awake; but, whether *we* awake or not, we beseech *you* to do so. For why should you perish; and perish, too, in the very presence of a dying and living Saviour? O think again before you finally reject his grace! Wherefore should his mercy be extended to you in vain, or only to be rendered by your perverseness the most dreadful element in your guilt and ruin? Wherefore should you “rush into the battle,” which, though you may brave it in the distance, will surely overwhelm you with irrecoverable destruction? Be at peace with your Maker. Submit yourselves to him who has borne the chastisement of your iniquities, while he continues to renew the invitation which has been despised too often, and still proclaims, “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.”

LECTURE II.

THE WARRANT AND ENCOURAGEMENTS OF ENDEAVOURS TO CONVERT SINNERS.

“The faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”—*Jude* 3.

I HAVE already endeavoured to show you, dear brethren, that the world around us is in a state of guilt and misery which appeals powerfully to your compassion, and calls loudly for efforts of mercy: we turn now to the consideration of THE WARRANT and ENCOURAGEMENTS to undertake them. In proceeding to this subject, you perceive I take it for granted that you find sufficient *inducement* to activity in the wretchedness which is before you; that reflection upon it has awakened deep emotions, and longing desires; that you are panting, not merely for the conversion of sinners to be effected, but to devote your own energies to so sacred an object; and that the only questions you ask are, whether you have leave to

labour for it, and whether you can do so with a just prospect of success. Am I safe in taking for granted so much as this? Or to awaken your compassion does it need more than the extremest depth of guilt, and the approach of eternal woes? Or have you been so unobservant of the heart-rending scene which is before you that its afflictive character makes no due impression? Is such a point to be perpetually reasoned over again, and are we never to get beyond this elementary lesson? Let me hope that the case is far different; that you have both cherished pity and resolved upon action; and that, before you commence a series of arduous and devoted exertions, you are only waiting to know upon what warrant, and with what encouragements, you may proceed.

These inquiries are both appropriate and important; for it would be painful if our efforts were either impertinent or hopeless. In order to answer them I have brought before you the words of the text, in which the apostle Jude instructs us that "the faith was once delivered to the saints." The word *faith* is here evidently used with considerable latitude. We conceive it to denote the Gospel. Now the Gospel may be considered as the system of divine truth relating to salvation; and in this view it has clearly been delivered to the saints. But it may be regarded also as God's appointed instrument for the conversion of sinners; and it is equally manifest that in this respect it has been delivered, or intrusted, to the saints, by them to be employed for its important end. It is this view of the passage which we mean to apply to the subject before us.

I. *What warrant, then, we ask in the first place, have Christians to attempt the conversion of sinners?*

In some respects this question might be deemed a very strange one. It is the same as asking, Have I a warrant to relieve distress? If you saw a person perishing with hunger, would you inquire whether you had a warrant to feed him? Or if one were drowning in your sight, would you pause lest you should not be duly authorized to snatch him from a watery grave? And why should such a question occur to us in reference to spiritual and eternal perils?

1. There are nevertheless some calamities which, however deeply they may move the compassion of a spectator, none may be permitted to relieve; as in the case of a malefactor

whom the outraged laws of his country doom to an ignominious death, and against whom the demands of justice are held to be so strong that no pleas of pity can be heard in his behalf. Such a case bears an obvious analogy to the condition of sinners, whose transgressions against God have subjected them to his righteous displeasure; and, if the almighty Governor himself had not interposed in mercy, and opened a way for their escape, efforts of mortal compassion would have been unauthorized and intrusive. We know, however, that God has so interposed, and himself become the Redeemer of mankind. The opinion that any part of our race are excluded from the benefit of this interposition, that they are born under condemnation, and that so they live and die without an opportunity or a hope of salvation even being presented to them, is both horrible and monstrous, and as far from the truth of God as darkness from light, and hell from heaven. We are assured on the contrary, that "God so loved *the world* as to give his only-begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" and that he delighteth not in the death of a sinner, but "will have *all men* to be saved, and come to the acknowledgment of the truth." O! when you look upon a sinner, you need not ask whether there is mercy *for him*; you need entertain no fears lest, not being one of the elect, he should find no way open for his escape, and no welcome at the cross of Christ. Let him be who he may, or what he may, he is comprehended in the gracious language of the Saviour, "Come unto me, *all ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" for "him that cometh unto me I will *in no wise* cast out."

2. The conversion of sinners has sometimes been supposed to be *so peculiarly God's work*, that any attempt to engage in it would be an intrusion on his province, and an infringement of his prerogative. We should be sorry to be guilty of any such impertinence or presumption; but upon this point we beg to make two remarks.

The first is, that, when God institutes *means* for accomplishing an end, he immediately throws it out of his exclusive province, which is to work *without means*, and brings it within the province of all creatures by whom the means he has instituted can be employed. If he had resolved to convert sinners without the use of any means at all, we

should then acknowledge that he had reserved that work entirely to himself; or if the means he had appointed were such as *we* were not competent to use, we should confess that it was withdrawn from *our* sphere of operation. But neither of these is the fact. He never converts a sinner but by the use of means which we are competent to use, namely, the word of truth: we maintain, therefore, that the conversion of sinners is thus brought actually and justly within our province; and that, in labouring for this end, we are doing what God has not only permitted, but intended us to do.

Our second remark is, that God is upon no other principle, and to no greater extent, the author of conversion, than he is of every other good result, natural and moral. All that is good comes from him, and, as to effectual agency, is wrought by him; that is to say, he gives his blessing to the means employed, and renders them successful to the end designed. In this sense it is he who causes grass to grow upon the mountains, and covers the valleys with corn; and in this sense, but in no other, it is he who turns a sinner from the error of his ways. He gives a blessing to the means employed for this purpose, and so makes them effectual; but he does *no more* than add his blessing to the means, so that the conversion of sinners is God's work just as far as the raising of corn is so, and no farther. No stronger confirmation of this idea can exist than the fact, that the language of Scripture continually proceeds upon the analogy between the natural and spiritual worlds; as when the apostle says, in reference to this very subject, "One planteth and another watereth, but God giveth the increase." If, therefore, the fact that conversion is God's work renders it impertinent and presumptuous to use the means appointed for producing it, equally presumptuous and impertinent must it be for the husbandman to plough the ground or to scatter the seed, for the raising of corn also is God's work. An argument which would lead to such an issue as this must be fallacious. In truth, the charge of presumption really lies, not against those who use appropriate means in order to desired results, but against those who expect results *without means*. Nor is it unworthy of observation, that the allegation that conversion is so peculiarly God's work as to preclude our exertion, is notoriously brought forward by persons who, however anxious they may be to prevent an intrusion on his

province, are very unwilling to perform the labour of their own.

3. It has been sometimes imagined that the conversion of sinners may not with propriety be attempted by any persons but those who are invested with an official character, such as that of the regular ministers of the Gospel. In this opinion we cannot by any means concur; but we think it may be clearly shown that, in the pursuit of this object, every Christian, of whatever age, character, or circumstances, is fully warranted to engage.

This might be concluded from the fact that *every Christian has the means of doing so*. The faith was delivered *to the saints*; a fact which not obscurely indicates the design of God that they should employ it. If a person is hungry and you have plenty of bread, do you hesitate to feed him because you are not an overseer of the poor? If you perceive sickness and are acquainted with a remedy, do you scruple to apply it because you are not of the medical profession? And, if the exercise of universal benevolence is not restrained by the existence of official character in these instances, why should it be so in reference to the souls of men? Allow that there are ministers of religion of various names; what is their claim to a monopoly of labours for the conversion of sinners, when God has put his truth, which is the means of conversion, into the hands of every one of his people? If every one that has bread may feed the hungry, so surely may every one that has the bread of life dispense it too.

As the Gospel is thus universally delivered to the saints in fact, *so it is universally of the nature of a trust*. It is delivered to them, not to be guarded merely, but to be employed. From this conviction have arisen the efforts which in all ages have been made to sustain the public ministry of the word, the activity which has been shown in later periods to scatter the Divine Oracles over the whole land and the wider earth, together with living witnesses to their excellency and power. At what point does this intention cease? Does it not, must it not, descend to every individual? For if it do not reach the individuals, how can it affect the body which is composed of them? Or if it be limited to some only, how can they be distinguished from the rest? It seems plain and unquestionable that, if the Gospel was *delivered to the saints*, it was to all of them with

the same design, namely, that every one of them should employ it for the end to which it is adapted.

In confirmation of this sentiment it is obvious to remark, that every true Christian—of course we except the hypocritical professor and the formalist—that *every true Christian is qualified to put the Gospel to its proper use*. We are not blind to the differences which prevail among them as to natural and acquired endowments, nor are we forgetful that some pious persons possess but very little knowledge and address; but we maintain nevertheless that all pious persons are fitted to attempt, and adequate to effect, the conversion of sinners. For that fitness lies, not in extensive reading, not in critical skill, not in superior talent—all which may be, and often are, separated from pure and undefiled religion; but in an experimental acquaintance with our lost condition, and with the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. These things every Christian knows; and every one who knows them can teach them. Often have the wise men of this world learned them from the lips of the comparatively ignorant, and acknowledged the overcoming eloquence of affection and of truth. Having then adapted every one of his people to the actual employment of the Gospel, which of them did God mean to prohibit from employing it? From which of them does he withhold a warrant to seek the conversion of his fellow-men?

We may observe, finally, that a *community of privilege obtains in the family of the redeemed*. Whatever diversity of treatment may characterize the dispensations of the Divine Father towards the several members of his family, there is no partiality in the distribution of the great privileges of salvation. The promotion of his glory in the conversion of sinners is one of the chief luxuries to a pious heart, and from none can we imagine for a moment that he has withheld it. How is it possible? That one redeemed by his grace, and led ardently to breathe after his glory, burning to give some proof of love to his name, and cherishing a pity like his own for sinners still on the brink of ruin, should have all these feelings repelled, by finding that he had no permission to employ himself for such an end, is perfectly incredible. Such feelings are in themselves too holy and too acceptable to God, too deeply affecting the happiness of his people and too closely connected with the progress of his cause, ever to be

repressed; and it is, in truth, to facilitate the utterance of them that he has entrusted the Gospel to the saints, that whoever breathes ardour for his service may find open to him a field in which he may labour and rejoice.

Behold then, dear brethren, the warrant under which you may proceed to the exertions which you have contemplated. If it be so that you have felt deeply for the perishing sinners amidst whom you dwell; if the guilty and condemned condition of eight or nine out of every ten of the persons you see has lain heavy upon your heart; if it has pierced you with sorrow to think how fast your acquaintances and friends are sinking into hell, and how soon those may be gone into darkness who yet survive; if you have gone before the Lord to pour out your griefs, and to ask him whether one like you may dedicate yourself to such a service, let your heart receive with joy the answer that he gives you. He graciously accepts your vows, and authorizes your labours. It is not his will that one of these rebels should perish. He has mercy for them all, and will give every one of them a welcome to his footstool. You may go and constrain them to come in. Whatever be your circumstances, nothing need obstruct you. Whether feeble or strong, whether an aged person or a child, whether with much knowledge or with little, whether with many opportunities or with few; you may do freely whatever it is in your heart to do for the souls of men. Do not let the vain imaginations we have been combating operate as a fetter on your exertions. Only may it be your happiness to have zeal proportionate to the scope which is given you, and to make full proof of the instrument which is intrusted to your hands!

II. We ask, secondly, *With what encouragements may endeavours for the conversion of sinners be undertaken?*

This also is an interesting question; since, however graciously permitted, it were but melancholy to labour without some prospect of success. And there are circumstances of no small force to induce painful apprehensions in this respect. Both from Scripture and experience we know that the carnal mind is enmity against God, and that, in presenting divine truth to men, we have to contend with a disposition extremely unfavourable, and directly hostile to its reception. Hence it becomes far more difficult than it would otherwise be to instruct them, yet more so to convict, and most diffi-

cult of all to persuade. They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. As an aggravation of this obstacle, dear brethren, you who make any attempts for the conversion of sinners would probably mention your own comparative ignorance and unskilfulness. You would say that you always come so far short of the clearness with which their evasions should be exposed, of the force with which conviction should be brought home, and of the earnest solemnity with which sinners should be entreated to be reconciled to God; in a word, that you find yourselves altogether so incompetent to contend with a wicked and a stubborn heart, that you fear little benefit can result from your exertions. Pause one moment, however, before you abandon them in despair; and let us see whether there are not some solid grounds on which you may yet entertain a just expectation of success.

1. Consider, then, in the first place, *the excellency of the instrument you have to employ*. It is the Gospel, the word of divine truth. In many instances it is the very letter of Scripture which you endeavour to bring home to the heart of a sinner; and when this is not the case, it is still the sentiment of God's Word which you address to him, although clothed in language of your own. These are your appropriate weapons: not the opinions of men, but the truths of God; and they constitute an armoury of great amplitude and power. Reflect upon its *adaptation*. How clear are the statements of the Bible! What a flood of light it throws upon all topics of spiritual and eternal interest! How convincing are its reproofs, and how well fitted to reach the conscience of the transgressor! How accurate and diversified are its descriptions of character; tracing iniquity in every form, and unwinding all the sophistries by which a rebel against God would fain either exempt himself from his authority, or shelter himself from his wrath! "For the word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, . . . discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart." How various and weighty are the motives by which it persuades! By what touching considerations does it appeal to the hopes and the fears of an immortal creature! Behold in it everything just in obligation or moving in kindness; everything dreadful in ruin or animating in deliverance; everything awful in vengeance or melting in

redeeming love! Behold in it considerations drawn from every quarter; from God, from man; from life, from death; from the present, from the future; from time, from eternity; from heaven, from hell; nor is there any region which is not laid under contribution, in order to furnish motives for a sinner to flee from the wrath to come. How manifest is its truth; its declarations free from error, its promises faithful, and its threatenings inflexible! How supreme is its authority; since it is not the word of man, but the word of God; not the mere counsel of an earthly friend, but the voice of the eternal Governor who speaketh from heaven!

Reflect upon its *sufficiency*. The Bible contains not only much that is adapted to the conversion of a sinner, but all that is needful for it; and accordingly it is declared by the apostle that "*it is able* to make us wise unto salvation." Nothing more is necessary in point of knowledge, either of our lost condition, or of the way of salvation by Christ Jesus. No more is necessary in the way of inducement; no more in truth can be said, for in the Gospel God has uttered all his heart, and all that can be brought to mortal view of the wonders of his ways. If these do not move men, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead, nor though they themselves were placed amidst the unveiled realities of eternity. But they must and will move the heart of every man whom you can prevail upon to consider them; for they are of a force unmeasurable and overwhelming, nor can they be looked at with attention without accomplishing the end for which they were designed.

2. Consider, secondly, *the character of the appointment* by which the Word of God is employed as the instrument of conversion. It is not a weapon of your own selection. You are not employing it because it appears suitable in your own eyes, or because it has in itself an adaptation and sufficiency. It is destined to its use and put into your hands by God himself, whose work pre-eminently salvation is in all its parts, and with whom it lies to ordain the means by which it should be accomplished. HE has delivered the faith unto the saints as *his* instrument for the conversion of the world. Can it then be imagined for a moment that the means which he has selected shall fail of accomplishing the end for which they are chosen? Had he the choice of his own weapons, and did he choose such a sword as shall have its edge turned in the

day of battle, and expose him to dishonour and defeat? It is utterly incredible. His own honour is identified with the success of his word, and it must therefore triumph.

It may encourage you to recollect also, that the Gospel is the *only* instrument which God has appointed for the conversion of sinners. The entire activity of Christians is intended to press it more directly on the attention of mankind, and their exemplary lives to illustrate and confirm it. The truth of the Gospel stands alone, the solitary and exclusive instrument by which the blessed God aims at the conversion of the world. This is a striking circumstance. If there were a variety of means by which the end might be attained, then perhaps the efficacy of any one of them might be regarded as less certain; but when there is only one method to be employed, it is manifest that, if the object is to be attained at all, that method must be successful. Such is the attitude in which God has been pleased to place his Gospel. He makes use of no other means to convert sinners. The question whether the Gospel is to be successful, therefore, is no other than this,—Are sinners ever to be converted? If they are (and we know they are to be so), the truth of God is to triumph over all the resistance of men; and this very weapon which you, dear brethren, are permitted to employ, is to prove victorious over the stubbornest and mightiest of the foes against whom it is directed by your hands.

3. Consider, thirdly, *the design of its being delivered to the saints*. It is intrusted to us, not to be hoarded as a treasure, but to be used as a sword; and with a view to lead us to engage in the great warfare which God is waging with the enmity of mankind. In accordance with this design, we take up our heaven-descended weapon, and begin the strife: in the face of an ungodly world, who stand ready, not only to resist, but to laugh us to scorn in the attempt, we commit ourselves to endeavours for their conversion. If we shall succeed in this enterprise, if we shall ultimately see the enemies of God humbling themselves before him, and find those who now scoff hereafter covering us with blessings, this attitude of defiance and of scorn will be very immaterial: but how will the case stand if it should not be so? If our sword inflict no deep wounds in the obdurate heart; if no arrow of conviction pierce the slumbering conscience; if the

glad tidings win no man from the ways of death; if a Saviour's love melt no frozen fountain of tears;—then indeed shall we return from the field discomfited and ashamed; and we shall come into the presence of our God to complain that he has sent us to the battle with ill-appointed arms, and summoned us to his help only to expose us to defeat. But can we suppose that he has done this? Was there any reason why he should do so? Or would it be consistent with the love which he bears to us, and has so often and so decidedly shown? O no! When he calls us to fight for him, it is not to cover us with shame, but to make us partakers of his triumph.

4. Consider, lastly, *the associated promise of the Spirit*. By the effectual agency (far too meanly estimated when it is spoken of as a part of the *instrumentality* merely) of this glorious Spirit, is success in all cases to be produced. The Word of God is but the instrument in the hand of the Spirit of God, without whose efficacious influence we know that it would be repelled but too successfully by the obduracy of men; but it is an instrument by which he means to work, and which his renewing power is pledged to accompany. Thus when our Lord delivered the great commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," he added, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." This spake he, doubtless, of the promise of the Spirit, which was soon illustriously poured out, as on the day of Pentecost and many subsequent occasions; and which has, with various modifications indeed, but with unvarying uniformity, attended the preaching of the Gospel in every age. This principle of the divine operation is as immutable as the ordinances of heaven. "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heav'n, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be, saith the Lord, that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Here, then, is the security of our success. The sword which we wield is the sword of the Spirit, the instrument through which he purposes to convey to the heart his quickening grace. In using it, therefore, we may rely upon his presence and his power; a power before which we are well

assured all the mists of ignorance will disperse, all the loftiness of pride will fall, the love of sin will be destroyed, and even the strong man armed, who has so long had peaceable possession and fights so hard to retain it, shall be spoiled of his armour and dispossessed of his prey.

On the grounds thus established, let me now direct to you, dear brethren, an earnest and affectionate appeal. See with what a gracious warrant, and with what ample encouragements, you may labour for the conversion of sinners! *Are* you labouring for this end, and henceforth do you mean to labour? Or are you still sluggish and unmoved? It is not *all* of you who refuse to labour; I know it is not, and I rejoice in the acknowledgment of it. But perhaps there are some of you who do so; and, under various pretexts—all of them as futile as the cause you neglect is interesting and glorious—refrain from personal and individual exertion for the conversion of sinners, not only in proportion to your opportunities, but perhaps even in a single instance. How can you bear to perceive that it is so? Is it really nothing to you that, in the midst of a population of immortal souls perishing by thousands, you may announce to every sinner the glad tidings that there is salvation for him, and entertain a cheerful hope that it shall not be in vain? You would stop and gaze upon a poor creature in the agonies of corporeal death; and is your attention not riveted one moment by your fellow-creatures in the crisis of spiritual death? You take delight in bearing relief to scenes of temporal distress; and is it not a luxury to you to convey peace and joy to those who are in peril of eternal woes? *May* you be instrumental in saving a soul from hell, and is it your resolution that you *will* not be so, and that you will not try? And can you maintain such a resolution as this without compunction, and without shame? Wonderful Christian! if Christian you are. How long shall there be upon you unheeded a mark which stamps feebleness upon your piety, attaches inconsistency to your profession, throws a doubt upon your sincerity, and is perpetually offensive to your Lord?

To those of you who are engaged, or purpose to be engaged, in efforts of mercy for the guilty and the lost, I have only to say, What ample encouragement attends you! Pity rises in your heart for the dying sinners around you. Give it full utterance, for you have full permission from heaven. God

has given for them his only-begotten Son, that they may not perish, but have everlasting life; and he gives you full authority to announce it to every rebel, and to invite, to exhort, and to persuade men to be reconciled to him. Hesitate not under any imagination of impropriety. God has put his Word, the very instrument of conversion, into your hands, with the express design that you should make the freest use of it. Whatever may be your circumstances or situation in life, be assured that nothing need exclude you from a participation in these labours and luxuries of love. As for your fears that you can do no good, cast them to the wind. I do not wish for a moment to lessen your opinion of your own ignorance and weakness; the probability is that we are all of us much more weak and ignorant than we apprehend ourselves to be; but, if you were a thousand times more so than you are, it would not interfere with your prospect of success. Your strength for this work lies not in yourselves, but in the Word of God, and in the promise of the Spirit. With these the feeblest assailant of ignorance and sin has an invincible strength, and with these you will as surely conquer as you fight. Is it *you* who enter on such labours with despondency, you who employ an instrument of heavenly adaptation and divine sufficiency; an instrument, and the only one, which God himself has chosen, which he has intrusted to your hands for the very purpose, and which he is pledged to accompany with the almighty energy of his Spirit? What could he do more to assure you of success? And if *you* despair, who shall retain courage? Speak not of the dense ignorance, of the bitter prejudice, of the engrossing worldliness, of the violent passions, of the confirmed habits of iniquity, with which you have to contend: before the word and the Spirit of the Lord they shall be as tow, and shall be destroyed and consumed together. Away with despair, and be confident. But *be wise*. Ever remember that your strength is in the word and Spirit of the Lord, and in them alone. In all your endeavours, therefore, let it be the Word of God which you employ. Seek to understand the truth of the Gospel correctly, and to communicate it faithfully. Mix not human errors with divine wisdom; or, if you do, be not surprised at your want of success. Endeavour to bring the whole aspect of Scripture to bear directly upon the heart and conscience of a sinner, in reach-

ing which the whole secret of the victory lies. Let your manner breathe the spirit of the truths you communicate. Be serious, earnest, and affectionately solemn. Let those with whom you converse perceive that their condition is a burden on your heart; let them feel that you are wrestling with them for their good, and striving to pluck them as brands out of the fire. To crown all, let your thoughts be continually lifted up to the Spirit of all grace whose promises encourage you to labour, in supplication that he will render your labours successful. Cherish the deepest consciousness of your own weakness; for when you are weak then will you be strong.

I address myself, finally, to those of you, dear friends, who constitute part of that guilty and miserable population to which our efforts of mercy are to be directed. You hear us speak of endeavouring to convert you. Perhaps you smile, or perhaps may resent the insinuation implied. It is immaterial. Behold under what sanction and with what encouragements we enter upon our work. The truth of God is delivered to us with his own hands to be employed for the purpose; and the Spirit of God is pledged to make it triumphant. You may resist; but, resist how you may, if we are faithful we shall succeed. O yes! *If we are faithful*, we may look forward to a time when, instead of sinners being the many they shall be the few, or rather, when no impenitent sinner shall be found within the place; when the streets, which have been so long polluted by streams of iniquity, shall be cleansed by streams of righteousness; when the scoffer, the profligate, and the infidel, shall acknowledge the glory of salvation, and rejoice in it as their own; when the decent but delusive formality of others shall be superseded by the power of godliness; and the whole desert shall blossom as the garden of the Lord. And amidst such circumstances, dear friends, what is *your* attitude to be? Some of you have gone to great lengths in sin, have given your passions a dreadful dominion over you, and have set at naught many reproofs. Is it not enough? What more can be necessary to show the wickedness of your hearts, or to establish your reputation for bravery against God? Will you not now submit to his mercy? Shall we not welcome you among the earliest converts to his service? Or are you resolved to persevere in your transgressions? If the king-

dom of heaven should suffer violence and every man be pressing into it, will you be the almost solitary exceptions to the general anxiety, and stand out amidst awakened crowds, conspicuous boasters in sin and awful victims of wrath? O! do not your souls this eternal wrong! Let it suffice you to have wrought thus far the will of the Wicked one. Approach at length to the blessed fountain of a Saviour's blood, which was opened for sin and for uncleanness, and to which you are yet called by the voice of eternal mercy. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool, though they be red like crimson they shall be whiter than snow."

LECTURE III.

EVERY MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CONDITION OF HIS FELLOW-MAN.

"If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not: doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall he not render to every man according to his works?"—*Proverbs* xxiv. 11, 12.

HAVING shown you, dear brethren, that the world around you is in a state of guilt and misery which calls loudly for your compassionate interference, I have hitherto taken it for granted that you would derive from this fact alone a sufficient inducement to exertion, and have contented myself with showing you the warrant and encouragements of your labours. I now advance a step further, and represent endeavours for the conversion of sinners as of direct and imperative obligation. It is not merely that you *may* enter upon them with an unquestionable warrant and with ample encouragements, but that you are *bound* to enter upon them. They are not merely efforts of kindness, which may be made or omitted at your pleasure; they are matters of duty, which must be fulfilled, or will be disregarded at your peril.

One would think that, in a case so powerfully appealing to our compassion as that of perishing souls, the introduction of such a motive as this could not be necessary; nor would

it be so, if our hearts duly responded to the call of pity. But as, on the one hand, the exhibition of the topic before us is essential to a just view of our obligations, and cannot but have a salutary influence on the tenderest heart; so, on the other, there is probably too much occasion for it in the defective influence of kindlier considerations. You can tell, dear brethren, whether motives of pity have acted on you as they ought. Has the melancholy condition of the ungodly around you affected you with a proportionate sorrow? Has the fact that the way for their salvation is open, and that the means of it are in your hands, supplied an adequate stimulus to your zeal? For my own part, I acknowledge in this respect a most lamentable and criminal deficiency. Deeply interesting as this work of kindness is, I find myself continually far too slow in it. Regarding it as a deed which *may* be done, I am too apt to think of it also as one which may be left undone; and my heart requires to be told often that it must be done, and that there is attached to it a solemn obligation and responsibility, which cannot be overlooked without present guilt and future sorrow. With my own bosom open to this appeal, therefore, I present it also to yours:—"If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not: doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall he not render to every man according to his works?"

It is reasonable that the ground of such an appeal should be satisfactorily, and even strongly laid; and the more so, because the conclusion to which we may come is one which our hearts are much disposed to evade, if not to resist. We bring forward, then, the general principle, that *every man is responsible for the condition of his fellow-man*; a maxim which is applicable, indeed, to the whole compass of human affairs, but pre-eminently so to those which respect an eternal world. This maxim it will be our present business to explain, to establish, and to apply.

I. EXPLANATION.

1. *Every man is responsible for the condition of his fellow-man.* The sentiment has about it, perhaps, something startling and paradoxical. It may be asked, How can any of us be responsible for the condition of another, which may

be determined by divine providence, or be affected by his own conduct or that of others, without our having any means of influencing it at all? Now we readily admit that, *so far as we have not the means of influencing the condition of others*, we incur no responsibility for it; but there is also some extent to which *we have the means* of improving the condition of others. How wide this circle may be, or how ample our means of occupying it, it is not needful to determine; these are questions which it behoves every Christian seriously to examine, and to decide for himself: but, whatever answer may be given to them, none of us can withdraw ourselves from the scope of the general sentiment, or say that there are not *any* of our fellow-creatures whose condition we have the means of improving. Whether larger or smaller, this is the province of our duty of which we now speak; and it remains to be seen whether, to the full extent to which we have the means of rendering our fellow-creatures more happy, we are not responsible for their being so.

2. But what do we mean when we say that every man is *responsible* for the condition of his fellows? Simply, that blame justly attaches to us if the condition of others be not as happy as we have the means of making it. We know that the primary responsibility of every man's condition rests with himself, so far as God has given him the means of rendering it a happy one, and we do not mean to say that any other man can be responsible for it to the same degree; but, since we possess also some means of influencing the condition of others as well as our own, a secondary responsibility is thus created. In this sense, and to this degree, a man is responsible for all the happiness he has the means of producing, and for all the misery he has the means of relieving. To whatever extent calamity is not prevented or happiness is not diffused, blame proportionately belongs to every person who has any means of promoting these results. Such is the sentiment we shall endeavour to establish.

II. PROOF.

1. For this purpose we observe, in the first place, that *we are clearly responsible for the use of all the means of doing good which are put into our hands*. This sentiment arises out of the very fact that such means are in our possession; for all of them are the gifts of God, and are bestowed upon us for the express purpose of diffusive beneficence. There is

no prodigality in his arrangements. If he imparts wealth, or any other means of communicating happiness, it is not that it should be either hoarded or wasted, but employed; and the very possession of such means indicates both the will of God, and the imperative obligation of the possessor. You should observe also, how perfectly the sentiment corresponds with the second great commandment of the divine law: *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. Now the love which it is both just and obligatory we should show to ourselves, is such as leads us to use for our own good all the means which God has given us to promote it. What then is the love which it is incumbent upon us to exercise towards our neighbour? Plainly that which will induce us to employ all the means we have of advancing his happiness too: we are to love him *as ourselves*. The employment of every means we have of bettering the condition of our fellow-creatures, therefore, is matter of express requirement; it is a part of God's law; it is the direct import of the single precept which, in lovely and majestic loneliness, but with perfect comprehension, guides the whole of our duty towards mankind. The question, then, whether we are responsible for the use of all our means of doing good, resolves itself into this,—whether we are responsible for fulfilling the law of God. Does it admit of more than one answer?

The conclusion to which we are thus led is confirmed by the common sense and the instant feeling of mankind. Every one feels that he who has the means of benefiting his fellow-creatures ought to employ them, and that he is blamable if he does not. Hence the odium attaching to the miser, who, by hoarding his treasure, withholds it from all employment advantageous to the community; and scarcely less to those among the wealthy who, with a lavish expenditure on their pleasures, allow but a scanty and reluctant pittance to the relief of the needy. In particular cases this appears still more strikingly. Suppose, for example, that there lies at your door a wretch perishing with hunger, incapable of making any other application for relief, and that, with ample provision in your house, you leave him there to die; or that you discover a person drowning, and, with every means of saving him at your command, you remain without making any exertion; or that you discern some one in imminent peril by fire, while you know a method of escape of which you give

him no information ; in such cases as these your conscience would loudly reproach you with having violated one of your most imperative obligations, and the execrations of your own heart would be justly re-echoed by every spectator of the deed.

2. We proceed to observe, that, *if we are justly responsible for the use of the means put into our hands, we are so for the results which those means are adapted to produce.* So far as certain ends would be attained by the employment of certain means, to be responsible for the attainment of the end is but the same thing as being responsible for the employment of the means. If I am answerable for using means of feeding the hungry, it is in no way altering my condition to say that, to the extent of my means, I am answerable for their being actually fed ; and as this sentiment is unquestionable in its principle, so it is every day acted upon in human affairs. Suppose, for example, that there was a criminal under sentence of death, for whom you knew that a pardon might be obtained, or, perhaps, that it had been obtained and was delayed on the road, and that, through your giving no information of it, the execution was not stayed ; would you think it hard if it were said that you were chargeable with that man's death ? The public voice, and your own conscience too, would call you his murderer. Or suppose that you knew of a plan of robbery and murder, which, by timely intelligence, you could in all probability frustrate, and that, notwithstanding, you suffer it silently to be accomplished ; could you ever think of repelling the universal indignation, by maintaining that you were not one of the thieves ? Let it be admitted that the immediate perpetrators were more guilty than yourself, enough of criminality remains to cover you with infamy, and, one would hope, to pierce you with remorse. There are cases in which judicial tribunals have awarded even the extreme penalty of the law, upon no other ground than the non-employment of means for the prevention of crime ; as on occasion of intended treasonable or insurrectionary movements, when the mere fact that a person possessed of information has not communicated it is held to render him justly chargeable with all the consequences which follow from his neglect. The weight of such responsibility becomes yet more serious, when the means of preventing any calamity have been intrusted to a person for the express

purpose of doing so ; as in the case of a watchman, whose duty it is to guard the night, but who, nevertheless, should quietly see either the incursion of robbers, or the bursting forth of flames, and give no alarm. Every watchman may reasonably be told, that, to the extent of the means intrusted to him, he is responsible for the safety of his district ; that is to say, for the result which the due employment of those means would produce. "If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned ; if the sword come and take any person from among them, his blood will I require at the watchman's hand."

By these observations, I trust, it is made sufficiently plain, that, to whatever extent he has the means of influencing it, every man is responsible for the condition of his fellow-man. The maxim thus established is capable of a very wide and important application. It should be brought into bearing in reference to the varied aspects of the temporal condition of our fellow-creatures ; but the limits, as well as the special object, of this discourse, confine our attention to its connexion with the great question of endeavours for their spiritual good.

III. APPLICATION.

1. This application of the maxim before us may, perhaps, require *to be justified*. It may be alleged that there is a material difference between the temporal and the spiritual necessities of mankind, and a peculiarity about the latter which exempts them from the operation of sentiments properly applicable to the former. That is to say, we can ensure the feeding of the hungry and the clothing of the naked, if the means are in our hands ; but we cannot ensure the conversion of a sinner. Perhaps if we speak he will not listen, and, at all events, we know that endeavours are of no avail without the grace of God.

Admitting these premises, we ask what conclusion is it intended to draw from them ? We suppose it is this, that sinners are to be abandoned to their ruin, and no efforts made for their conversion. And why ? Because we are not sure we shall succeed ! Try the application of this principle to temporal concerns. Imagine yourself beholding a burning habitation, and the distracted inmates wildly seeking escape from a fiery tomb. You are agitated ; you ask if there is no help ; you begin to place a ladder to the walls :

but wherefore? You have no certainty of success. Be quiet, and let everything alone. You justly reject this advice as barbarous and inhuman, and persist in the use of every effort while life and hope remain. Now tell me why you do not do the same for men's souls? It is for no reason but because you have learned to look on perishing souls with most unchristian and almost miraculous tranquillity.

But it requires the grace of God to convert a sinner. True; and it requires the providence of God to save one person from the flames. Wherein do the two cases differ? In the nature of the peril to be escaped, in that of the means to be employed, and in the method by which they operate, but not at all as to the principle upon which means are to be employed; and this is all that is important in the case. With respect to persons in peril by fire, here are means adapted to their rescue, but their success depends upon the blessing of divine providence; does any one think of abandoning the use of them on this account? With respect to the conversion of a sinner the case is essentially similar. Here also are means adapted and sufficient to the object, for the Holy Scriptures *are able* to make men wise unto salvation; the influence of divine grace is necessary to their success; but why should this operate against endeavours in this case, any more than the necessity of providential aid in the former? God is all in all, and there is no success without his blessing. The conversion of sinners by no means stands out from other works of kindness, as invested with any peculiarity in this respect; it is rather part of a uniform system, and an individual instance of a universal truth: either, therefore, let the use of means be abandoned in all cases, or let it be cheerfully and vigorously adopted in this.

The truth is that, in all ordinary cases the use of means proceeds upon no other principle than their just adaptation to the end. When satisfied on this point, no man thinks of hesitating because he is not sure of success, or because the blessing of God is necessary to it. In this view an ample foundation is laid for the use of means for the conversion of sinners. Here are means instituted for the purpose, and adapted to it by infinite wisdom and eternal love; means which are fully sufficient for the end to which they are appointed, which have been successful in a thousand instances, which are to be successful in ten thousand more, and which

God has promised to crown with his abundant blessing. And is this a case in which we are to hesitate? And the only one, too, in which hesitation is pleaded for; when there is no case in which such an important good is to be attained, and none in which such ample encouragements are associated with the effort? Utterly untenable is such a conclusion in argument; and shame be to the hand and the heart which arrive at it, either in feeling or in fact!

We deem ourselves justified in maintaining, then, that the sentiment we have established in a general view is not at all more applicable to the concerns of the present world than to those of the future. So far as he has the means of improving it, every man is as truly responsible for the spiritual as for the temporal condition of his fellow-man; that is to say, every one of us is justly chargeable with, and blamable for, every degree of ignorance, sin, and misery, which we have means either to prevent or to remove.

2. If the application of our maxim to the concerns of religion requires on the one hand to be justified, it requires yet more, on the other, *to be enforced*. It is still harder to feel than to admit it. But, with whatever difficulty arising from established habits of thought or feeling, let it be brought home to our hearts as a truth, and with a sincere willingness to feel the whole of its power.

What a light it throws upon the past! A *light*, did I say? I should rather have said a *shadow*. It is true, then, that whatever of guilt and misery I might have prevented or remedied is chargeable upon me; to a certain and a very serious extent, they are the same to me as though I had actually caused them. Let me ask, therefore, what the aspect of my life has been in this respect. Since I knew the Lord, have I used every proper means, and improved every favourable opportunity, for the conversion of sinners? I have been thrown among them in various ways. As a parent, a master, a relation, a neighbour, an acquaintance, I have continually had around me persons destitute of religion. How have I regarded them? Perhaps with some feeling of disapprobation and of pity; but with an idea, probably, that their salvation was their own concern, and that, if they neglected it, they must bear the consequences. Have I looked on their conversion as *my concern* also; and felt that, if I did not use every means I had to promote it, an afflic-

tive measure of the blame of their ungodliness would be chargeable upon *me*? Realizing the fact that I had my own soul to deliver, even if I did not succeed in delivering theirs, have I done all that zeal could dictate, and wisdom sanction, to turn them from the error of their ways? Alas! who can endure such an inquiry? Ah! when we look back upon the course of our profession, even if it has not been spent in total, or almost total, neglect of the conversion of sinners, how much matter of self-condemnation immediately presents itself! A little, perhaps, we have done: but how much might we have done! Upon how many occasions might we have spoken when we did not, and to how many persons who have passed away from our influence without any adequate testimony of our anxiety for their eternal welfare! To how small an extent has the ordinary intercourse of life been modified by a studious endeavour to produce spiritual benefit, and how many precious opportunities of doing so have we suffered to be consumed by the mere generalities of social converse! Think of the children and servants, the relatives and friends, the neighbours and acquaintances, whose souls' welfare you might, in innumerable instances, and without any departure from Christian wisdom, have endeavoured to promote, and have not done it; think that herein you have trifled at once with the glory of God, with your own duty, and with their eternal felicity; and you will find a multitude of transgressions, and a load of guilt, beneath which your conscience ought to be heavily burdened, and your heart deeply afflicted. Look moreover at the result of it. Behold those who live! Many of them are still living in sin, and that *all* of them are not so is not owing to *you*. But many of them *are* still ungodly, dishonouring their Maker, despising the Redeemer, unhappy in life, unfit to die, and unsafe for eternity; and all this, in a fearful measure, is to be ascribed to your carelessness and sloth. Think of those who have died! Many of these also have died in sin, and are gone—alas! whither? To meet an angry God, to appear before a righteous tribunal, to hear an awful doom, to suffer an eternal vengeance. They are now lifting up their eyes in torments of unutterable intensity, and endless duration. And their ruin is partly chargeable on you; for you might have warned them, and you did not; you had the means of their conversion in your hands, and you did

not employ them; you saw them ready to perish, and you made no suitable effort for their rescue. Respecting them the all-seeing God may repeat the heart-piercing words which he addressed to Cain after the murder of Abel, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." Alas! dear friends, concerning our brother *we have been verily guilty*, and our guilt ought to lie heavily on our hearts. What should we feel if we had suffered a person to perish of hunger at our door; if we had inactively seen one sink in the water; or if by our supineness we had been the occasion of the perpetration of a deed of blood? We should reckon such an occurrence among the greatest afflictions of our lives; it would be one never to be forgotten; it would fill us with almost ceaseless self-reproaches, and mingle its bitterness with all our joys. Do we feel less at the recollection that through our negligence immortal souls have perished, and that there are those in everlasting agonies who, if we had been faithful to our duty, might have been in glory? Oh! there is no subject on which we need to be more deeply humbled than our participation in the ruin of souls; there is no prayer we have more need to adopt than that of David, in its most touching import, "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God!"

While the sentiment that we are responsible for the spiritual condition of our fellow-creatures gives a painful complexion to the past, *it applies a powerful stimulus to the future*. We are still surrounded by persons destitute of piety. Let us remember that, to whatever extent we have the means of leading them to the knowledge of themselves and of Christ Jesus, we are responsible for their eternal welfare. To this extent, if they, or any one of them, die in sin and perish for ever, it will be our fault. What a heart-stirring consideration! Is it needful to ask what we mean to do in such circumstances? What should we do if we were so situated that our conduct would be the means of destroying men's lives, or of saving them? We should feel it a heavy responsibility, and be incessantly anxious that no fellow-creature should perish through our neglect. And are we going to feel less, or do less, for the souls of men? Can we bear to think that our inaction should be the occasion of their eternal perdition, or that our hands should become, in however indirect a manner, stained with their blood?

Let us view this matter in connexion with a future day; I mean the great day of account, when it will assuredly be taken up again, with feelings, perhaps, very different from the present, but certainly far more intense. If we fail to make a due improvement of our opportunities and means for the conversion of sinners, *what shall we then say to ourselves?* We shall see with new eyes, and in a more vivid light, the value of immortal souls, and our obligation to have sought their welfare. Directly before us will be the glories of the heaven they have lost, and the terrors of the wrathful region in which they must dwell for ever. Imagine, then, that, with these things before you, you discover among the lost even one whom you might have warned of his danger, and perhaps have rescued from the burning. Will it not tear your very heart to have to say—"Poor wretch! you are there because I neglected your instruction! I was your neighbour, your acquaintance, your friend, your relative, perhaps your parent; and by my sloth I have become the murderer of your soul!" Oh! with what anguish will misimproved opportunities be looked upon *then*; then never to be regained, though now too heedlessly squandered.

But we have not to ask only what we shall say to ourselves in that day; *what will the lost say to us?* When, from the dreadful region of their sorrow, they shall look on us among whom they have lived in occasional, or perhaps in constant, intercourse, what will be their feelings towards us then? *Now* I know that reproofs are unwelcome, and perhaps resented; but how will they regard us then! Every effort for their good, even the severest reproofs, will be turned into matter of thankfulness and love. There is nothing for which they will reproach us but our silence, and for this their reproaches will be bitter indeed. One can almost realize the voice of anguish: "You knew where I was going, and you might have warned me; but you did not. I was often with you, even in your very family, and you talked to me of a thousand matters of comparatively trifling interest; but this, of infinite moment, you neglected. The consequence of it is that I am here; the victim, indeed, of my own follies, and justly suffering the reward of my deeds: but was it kind of you to plead with me no more? Or, amidst my hopeless anguish, can I refrain from recalling those many opportunities which, if you had improved them,

might have prevailed to save me from this flame?" What shall we say to such an appeal, but this:—"Alas! ruined one! O curse me not, though I am guilty of thy blood."

Once more. In that day, what will God himself say to us? "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death and those that are ready to be slain, . . . doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? And shall he not render to every man according to his works?" Will he not look in that day for evidence of the faithful employment of the means he has given? Has he not said, "If thou warn not the wicked he shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hand"? Are we willing that he should find our hands stained with the blood of souls? Will it be to our happiness that he should have to say—"I gave thee means of delivering them that were drawn unto death, but thou hast forborne to use them; thou has lived in supineness and self-indulgence, while souls have been perishing around thee"?

Let it not be objected that these reflections are incompatible with the gracious acceptance, the joy, and triumph, which the Scriptures associate with the condition of the righteous at the general judgment. Such representations go upon the supposition of the righteous *being righteous*, or in all respects what they ought to be, and so far as they are so will they be verified; but surely no further. Is the plaudit, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" to be addressed to a servant who has *not been faithful*, but indolent; or to any servant *any further* than he has been faithful? Or is the approbation of partial fidelity to prevent the notice, not the condemning but still the reproving notice, of innumerable and inexcusable transgressions? It is altogether incredible. The day of judgment will be a day of immense discovery, and of nothing more largely than of sin, both in its extent and in its heinousness. It is then, and not till then, that we shall see countless faults of which we now know nothing, and every fault in its real magnitude. Is it possible that such a discovery can be unproductive of sorrow and of shame? Will the mere fact that we are not to be condemned for our transgressions shut up all the sources of godly sorrow and generous contrition? It is utterly impossible; nor can we entertain any doubt but that the last day will be a day of pre-eminent repentance, far exceeding in depth and bitterness all that is felt on earth, as it will be

also of transcendent forgiveness, and corresponding joy. Yet the joy of pardoned sin will surely be much less than that of accepted service; and the reproofs of that day must be far from being desirable, even though they be the language of injured friendship, and not of avenging wrath.

The solemnities of the future, therefore, *are* adapted to exercise a just and powerful influence upon the present. Our conduct in reference to the conversion of sinners will come under deliberate review before the bar of God; and, in order to know how we should acquit ourselves now, it is imperative upon us to consider how it will affect us then. Only realize, dear brethren, the glories of that day; only live, and speak, and act, as though you were already there, and we ask of you no more. Can you be content with less?

If you were to do this, what aspect would your conduct assume? Unquestionably that of earnest diligence. You would immediately take an attentive survey of your condition. You would inquire, what are the means in my hands of promoting the salvation of men? To whom can I speak, to how many persons, and upon how many occasions, without a departure from Christian wisdom? And in what other methods can I advance the same end? Such means as are open to you you would immediately and continually employ, with a zeal of unquenchable ardour and resolute activity. I know the hindrances to the production of such a result. Our hearts find many pretexts to avoid a life of self-denying labour. We say that the ruin of sinners is their own fault, that they have ample opportunities, and should take care for themselves; that we are not called to speak to them; that we are not fitted for it; that others do it sufficiently without us; that, if we did, they would not hearken; and many similar things. But to all this there is surely one sufficient and overwhelming answer: "If I do not use every means in my possession, their ruin will be chargeable upon me; and I cannot bear it. It would be dreadful to be the occasion of a temporal calamity; but, as to becoming by any supineness of mine the occasion of eternal misery, the very thought of it is insufferable. I *must* rise and labour; and at all events deliver my own soul, if I deliver none besides. These poor transgressors may perish after all; but none of them must have cause to pour their curses on my head as accessory to their destruction!"

To you, dear friends, who are yet without Christ and without hope, let me suggest a lesson which you should learn from the subject we have been treating. If our responsibility concerning your eternal state is so serious, how awful must be your own! Oh! do you know indeed, that your precious souls are in danger of endless sorrow, and that the means of salvation are in your hands? Do you indeed know that *it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even the chief?* Do you indeed know that this blessed book *is able to make you wise unto salvation?* Are you giving diligent heed to the things which belong to your peace? Or are you casting them behind your back? O beware lest you perish! By all that is just in your obligations and heinous in your guilt; by all that is touching in mercy or terrible in wrath; by all that is solemn in death and awful in eternity, I beseech you to be reconciled to God. Why should you die? Why *will* you die; when a condescending God, and heaven and earth in harmony with him, invite you to turn that you may live? At all events, be witnesses for me that I am clear of your blood; and, if in the ways of sin it should at length be madly shed, do thou, O heart-searching God, not require it at the watchman's hand!

LECTURE IV.

THE SOURCES AND INFLUENCE OF COMPASSION FOR SOULS.

“And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion towards them because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.”—*Mark* vi. 34.

THE compassion of our Lord on this occasion was obviously excited by the spiritual condition of the multitudes whom he beheld. With whatever differences, in many important respects our situation is the same as his then was. On every hand we see much people who are going astray like lost sheep, who have no experimental acquaintance with the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, and whose eternal welfare

is yet far from being secured. Ought we also not to feel as Jesus felt? Why should his heart be moved with compassion, and not ours? It may be said, perhaps, that the disciples of Christ do feel as he did; and to a certain extent this is true. If we are his disciples indeed, there are in us the elements of a character like his own; but they are in a great measure in embryo, and require to be developed. The seeds of pity for the lost are within us; but it is needful they should grow, and bring forth fruit. None of us, I suppose, would say that we feel as much of it as Christ felt, or as we ought to feel. To know how far short we come of such a state of mind, let us only look on an ungodly person, and honestly ask ourselves *how much* grief the contemplation of his spiritual wretchedness inspires. We shall probably be surprised to find how small the quantity is, and how near we are to beholding him with an almost undisturbed tranquillity. But ought we not to be afflicted by so much apathy? Should not the example of our divine Lord awaken and instruct us? Behold how beautifully illustrative it is, both of THE SOURCES AND THE INFLUENCE OF COMPASSION FOR SOULS. "And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion towards them because they were as sheep not having a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things."

I. We derive from this passage, in the first place, an illustration of the *sources* of compassion for souls. Our Lord plainly considered the persons he beheld as *lost sheep*; a character under which the whole of mankind are scripturally represented, and one well adapted to shadow forth the unhappiness of an unconverted state.

1. We observe, then, first, that *the condition of ungodly persons is powerfully adapted to awaken our compassion.*

I should describe no inconsiderable wretchedness, if I were to show you how hard the way of transgressors is in the present state; but I pass over the vain excitements and bitter disappointments of life, together with the deeper melancholy of a hopeless death, to direct you at once to the awful aspect of eternity. *For the wrath of God, which has long been revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, is inflicted on their entrance into the unseen world.* When a sinner dies he appears before his Maker; but, oh! it is to behold him arrayed in frowns, and

armed with vengeance; it is to read in his angry countenance the sentence of just condemnation, to hear from his awful lips the doom "Depart!" and to feel the force of that almighty hand by which the wicked shall be driven into hell, with all those that forget God. And into hell he descends; a place to which, with all its terrors, he might be glad to fly, if it afforded any shelter from the heart-piercing eye or the avenging hand of his Judge; but there the wrath of God still lives, around him and within him. This is the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; this is the worm gnawing at the heart. How dreadful must anguish be which needs to be exhibited by such illustrations as these! And how much more dreadful than any such metaphors can represent must the actual sufferings of a sinner be, when he is made as miserable as he has been sinful, and receives from the hand of his Maker all the indignation which his rebellion has deserved.

It is a melancholy aggravation of this heart-rending topic, that *the sufferings of the world to come admit of no termination*. Oh! of all states of sorrow, one would say, whichever of them may be perpetuated, let *this* have an end! But this, and of all sorrows this alone, is everlasting. All other pains will cease, and, with whatever sympathy you may look upon them, you may reckon with certainty that they will one day subside into tranquillity; but these agonies endure for ever. At whatsoever period, or after whatsoever duration, you may look at the flaming gulph where sinners lie, you will see that those fires are burning still, and that the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever. Even death, the chief of mortal ills, is banished from that place of torment, where alone it might be a mitigation of calamity; and, amidst sufferings which the vigour of immortal being can scarcely endure, that being still sustains an immortality of woe.

Such is the state of sorrow to which every ungodly man is advancing: a state of sorrow which defies comparison with any and every other. *The danger is as imminent as it is dreadful*. As yet, indeed, he is not there; but what divides him from it? A step; a breath; a moment; and no more. 'Tis life, and only life, upholds a sinner from his doom. And what is life? A feeble thread, liable every moment to be cut. On every hand are the living continually being trans-

formed into the dead, at every age, in all circumstances, and often with alarming suddenness. Every man stands on the brink of eternity, and every ungodly man on the brink of hell. We walk on the edge of graves, and the earth is continually crumbling beneath our feet to receive us to our long home. The danger, therefore, though not actually present, is in the utmost degree imminent. When you look at an irreligious person, you are quite justified in saying, "Before I see you again, or even while I gaze upon you, you may sink into perdition."

It is additionally affecting to observe, that *the miseries of ungodly men are not heaped upon them by others, but inflicted by themselves*. Their Maker would not do them an injury; nor could any other being, whether human or diabolical, accomplish such a purpose apart from their own permission. It is with willing feet they run the road to death. With ample means of controlling every passion, they cherish those which are evil; and, with the utmost facilities for holiness and happiness, they yield themselves to the service of iniquity, though the wages of it is death. What would you feel if you saw a fellow-creature lacerating his own flesh, or thrusting himself into the fire? And what more should we not feel, while men are most wantonly inflicting deeper tortures, not upon the body, but upon the soul?

This heart-breaking process is accomplished, too, not merely in the midst of mercies, but by the very means of mercies themselves. A man has nothing but benefits by which he can effect his own ruin. Life and the bounties of providence, together with the various means of instruction and of hope, these are things given to a man that he may be happy; yet these are the very things which an ungodly man turns into the instruments of his destruction. The mis-improvement of his Maker's gifts constitutes his guilt, and draws down upon him condemnation; so that, out of the full cup of goodness which is presented to him, he perversely extracts the draught of bitterness and wrath. Unhappy wretch! out of the tender mercies of the Lord to forge a weapon for the murder of thy own soul!

To all this it must be added, that *sinners are thus madly accomplishing their own ruin in the midst of opportunities of escape, and in defiance of the most gracious and earnest calls*. All heaven breathes compassion for them; the Son of God

has laid down his life for their rescue ; the eternal Father calls in mercy, "Do thyself no harm ;" and set open before them is the way of salvation, the gate of eternal life ; but all, all in vain. Their reply substantially is, "We have loved our sins, and in them we will die."

I need not, I will not, ask you, dear brethren, whether this is a case which justly appeals to your compassion. You know that no calamity is once to be named in comparison with it, nor indeed the sum of all earthly calamities, could their whole force be concentrated in the person of a single sufferer. They would not be felt too deeply if we wept over them tears of blood. But what have I effected by making this representation to you ? How do you really feel in the contemplation of so touching an object ? Has a proportionate compassion actually arisen in your hearts ? You are convinced, indeed, that you ought to compassionate the ungodly ; but you are probably conscious too that, in any just degree, you do not, and that you will not do so much the more tenderly for this presentation of the object to your mind. There is a mass of comparative apathy upon which such an effort makes no sensible or considerable impression ; yet it is this very apathy which it is all-important to remove. What we want is not the verdict of your conscience, this we can easily gain at any time ; but it is the accordance of the heart, which is far less easily won.

2. We observe, therefore, secondly, that *the excitement of compassion for souls requires a frequent and serious application of the truths we have surveyed.*

If we really wish to view ungodly men with a due tenderness of spirit, it is of the highest importance to acquire a deep sense of their misery itself. Let us gain a powerful realization of it in its various aspects, and look on it intently, until we see it, not only in its accurate outline, but in its full magnitude and its proper colours ; and then we shall be qualified to look on the men who are exposed to it. One would think this ought to be no difficulty to us, since the condition is one in which we ourselves have been, and our rescue from which forms the most memorable occurrence of our lives : yet which of us is not deficient in this respect ?

It is no less important practically to associate this general apprehension of the wretchedness of an impenitent sinner with the individuals who may be considered by us as bearing

such a character. It should be the first inquiry we institute mentally respecting every one we see, May this person be regarded as a true Christian, or not? and, if there is reason to fear that he may not be so regarded, we should immediately associate with him the recollection of the wretched condition in which every impenitent sinner lies. Much more studiously than his countenance, his wealth, his worldly circumstances, or any other particular, should we note this fact—Here is a rebel against God, under his wrath, and on the brink of hell. By many causes we are hindered from pursuing such a method as this. We are apt to content ourselves with a merely earthly and superficial view of our fellow-creatures, the carnality of our own minds spreading itself over all that we see, and assisting to hide from us the spiritual aspect of things. We are too willingly beguiled by the apparent happiness of men, and find it hard to suppose that persons so cheerful, or perhaps so gay, can be really in a condition so melancholy. We are entangled in the web of a spurious charity, and feel as though it were wrong to imagine that the respectable and amiable people around us, or those whom we ourselves more especially respect and love, can be in such a sense objects of our compassion. But we should be on our guard against these treacherous mischiefs. As to spiritual things, men are really what they are before God, and according to his Word; and there is no way of cherishing towards them a right state of feeling, short of breaking through these and all other obstructions to judging of them according to this rule.

I will suppose that henceforth you make this attempt, and look at every man first and chiefly in the light of eternity. What will be the result? When you have said within yourself, "These my children, these my servants, this my neighbour, my friend, my acquaintance, or this stranger, I am constrained to regard as without religion,"—when you have said this how will you feel? Will you feel all the tenderness and pity of your heart awake at the thought, and compassionate the sinner as one overwhelmed with woes? Too probably not; but in connexion with this very truth you may rather find yourself, if not totally, or almost totally, unmoved, falling very far short of proportionate compassion. And what are you to do with this remaining and inveterate obduracy? To cherish it? To excuse it? To leave it alone?

God forbid! Make it a matter of severe self-reproof and vigorous discipline. Note it immediately as a state of mind which is wrong, and which calls imperatively both for humiliation and amendment. Chide your heart for its want of sensibility to so touching an object, and bring to bear on yourself those applicable and weighty considerations with which the Word of God presents you.

Think how inconsistent it is with the pity you so promptly feel for temporal distress. Say within yourself, "I should not see a person hungry or thirsty, in cold or nakedness, without being stirred to sympathy; how is it that my feelings are awakened so slowly by far heavier sorrows? I pity an afflicted body; why not a suffering soul? I am concerned for those who are bearing the troubles of time; why not for such as are hasting to those of eternity? If I saw a person in imminent peril by fire, my heart would be intensely agitated; why is it not more so by seeing men who are as brands already in the everlasting burning? Is a heart really compassionate which is so capricious and inconsistent; which feels so much for the lesser woes, and so little for the greater? Is it even less than inhuman to possess so little sensibility to the most awful miseries of mankind?"

Think how inconsistent it is with the profession of religion. Resume your soliloquy thus: "I profess to have learned the value of my own soul, and to have seen the awfulness of my own peril as a sinner; I profess to have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before me, and to prize deliverance from the wrath to come as one of the most inestimable of benefits; but, if this is really the case with me, how is it that I feel no more for others? There are persons around me who are in precisely the same state of wretchedness and danger which, when it was my own, seemed to fill me with the deepest anxiety; but, if I was really anxious for my own rescue, why am I not so for my neighbour's? If I were one of a number encompassed by flames, and had happily succeeded in effecting my own escape, should I stand by unmoved and see the remainder perish? And with respect to salvation, am I so selfish that, now my own interest is secured, I have no pity for those who are still hasting to ruin? Or is it not rather that I form a low estimate of a sinner's condition, and am far from being truly awake to its awful character? If I duly prized my own soul, should I not inevitably prize

more highly that of another? And does not the fact that I feel so little for another's justify a suspicion that I have never felt as I ought for my own?"

Think what a want of resemblance it indicates to the Lord Jesus Christ. He left us an example that we should follow his steps, and in no respect is his example more engaging or more obligatory than in his compassion for the souls of men. The sight even of a single ungodly person was always a heart-stirring one to him, and his compassion promptly manifested itself, both in words and in deeds. Let each of us say: "Is it the same with me? And if not, why not? What justifies me in having a different spirit, or what can even excuse me? Ought I not to be like my Lord? Is it right for him to be showing one spirit and his professed followers another? Was he in the continual exercise of a tender pity for just such sinners as are around me, and am I going to live in the midst of them comparatively unmoved? Forbid it all that is consistent in profession, all that is faithful to the Saviour! And thou, my heart, either copy the spirit of thy Lord, or resign his name!"

Think what an obstruction it is to your activity and usefulness. Compassion for souls is one of the main springs of holy exertion, and is eminently adapted both to produce and to sustain it. But if this be absent, or even if it be feeble, our zeal will of necessity be proportionally languid, and our usefulness small. What a painful thing it should be to us, to carry in our own bosom an impediment to our Christian devotedness; to have a heart so greatly wanting in one of the chief impulses and supports of active dedication to our Lord! Let us ask ourselves if we can be content with such a state of things, and how long it is to be ere we rise against such an enemy to our usefulness, with a holy determination to expel it from our breasts.

Of all labour, that which is bestowed upon our own hearts is the most certain of success. A course of discipline like this could not fail to be the means of diminishing our grievous apathy, and of cherishing a spirit of tender pity for dying sinners. We shall deceive ourselves very much, however, if we imagine that such a spirit is to be obtained by any other means. Sensibility to temporal distress may be natural and constitutional, and may require no effort to cherish it; to a certain degree in all persons, and in some to

a very eminent degree, it exists of itself, and comes into exercise uncalled : but sensibility to spiritual misery is of a very different character. By nature it has no place in man's obdurate heart ; and, if it comes into existence at all, it must spring out of the elements of pure and undefiled religion, and have its birth among the graces of the Spirit. Now we all know that holy dispositions, as implanted in the heart by the Spirit of God, resemble seeds cast into the earth ; the vital principle is there, but it develops itself only as it is stimulated and nourished by the soil. In like manner every gracious temper, whether humility, or love, or joy, or spirituality, grows only as it is cultivated, and in proportion as the truths which are adapted to nourish it are dwelt upon and applied. It is the same with compassion for souls. The elements of it exist in every person who is born from above ; but the development of it may nevertheless be very small, and it can never go beyond the heartfelt application of the truths adapted to promote it. Like every other plant of heavenly origin, it needs the aid of careful and constant cultivation, nor can it ever flourish in any other method. Whatever may be the influence of the present address, therefore, I have no expectation of permanent benefit, either from the mere delivery of it on my part, or from the hearing of it upon yours. It may have produced a perception of what you ought to feel, it may have excited some present emotions ; but transient will all those emotions be and inoperative that perception, unless they are connected with a discipline of your own hearts. If you really wish to contend effectually with your remaining insensibility to spiritual woes, you must begin and maintain the strife in the exercise of solitary piety. It is in your chamber that you will most clearly discern and most readily detect the lurking enemy ; it is there that you will feel most deeply afflicted at its existence within you ; and it is there that you will find most ready to your hand the appointed weapons of its destruction. O look upon it there, where you feel the depth of your guilt, the height of your bliss, and the magnitude of your obligation, and you will hate it with a perfect hatred : withdraw it from these lights, and it needs no more, not merely to perpetuate its being, but to consolidate its power.

Allow me, then, to make to you, dear brethren, a close and faithful appeal. Do you desire that whatever remains

within you of defective sensibility to the spiritual wretchedness of mankind may be exterminated? Do you really wish that your hearts should glow with a compassion for sinners as ardent as their woes deserve? If you do, I beseech you to pursue the course of discipline I have recommended to you; I may rather say, I am sure you will do it, and will think no trouble too great to attain so important an end. But *if you do not*—alas! how can I make such a supposition? Or if, in any case, it should unhappily be a correct one, what can I say to you? Yet, if any of you really do not wish for the banishment of apathy, and could be well content without the attainment of a commensurate pity for souls, remember at all events what you are doing. Remember that you are retaining and cherishing a temper unworthy of you as a man, inconsistent with your sincerity as a Christian, grievously opposed to the spirit of your Lord, and almost destructive of your usefulness in the world. And as for a revival of religion, a multiplicity of conversions,—the indulgence of such a state of mind removes it to an immeasurable distance. How can we expect the blessing from the Most Holy, while we are yet unwilling to sacrifice upon his altar our supineness and our sloth?

II. In the cheerful persuasion, however, that a measure, though far from a fulness, of compassion for the souls of men exists within you, dear brethren, I proceed to notice, in the second place, the illustration to be derived from the passage before us of the *Influence* of this heavenly temper. When Jesus was moved with compassion towards the multitudes, “he began to teach them many things.” *He immediately adopted measures for relieving the woes which he pitied.*

1. This was perfectly characteristic. Compassion impels to exertion. The influence of it is to make another's griefs our own, to transfer the sorrows we pity into our own breast. Now we are never insensible to our own griefs, nor slow to relieve them; neither shall we be slow in attempting the relief of others, when their sorrows become to us as our own.

The fact agrees with the principle. Compassion uniformly *does* lead to exertion; and whoever professes to feel it without making corresponding efforts, if any are in his power, only exposes himself to the charge of hypocrisy. You know how promptly you endeavour to mitigate the trials which have excited your sympathy; and the amount of such efforts

is a fair gauge of the compassion which actually exists in the world.

But the effect of compassion is not merely to produce exertion. It leads to the use of *every* means we may have of affording relief, and suffers no cessation, if the distress continues, till all be employed. Nay, it may be said to command more than all, inasmuch as it suggests many methods of increasing their amount. It brings ingenuity into exercise to contrive the methods in which most may be done; it suggests the practicability of sacrifice and self-denial; it makes us think how many comforts or conveniences we might dispense with for the sufferer's relief; and teaches us to value more their conduciveness to another's enjoyment than to our own.

To this it may be added, that the influence of compassion is as constant as it is powerful. During its exercise, it allows no intermission of practicable labour. The continual pressure with which the grief of another bears upon the heart supplies a stimulus ever new. If the feeling be equally intense, its impulse is as powerful to-day as it was yesterday, and it will be no less powerful to-morrow than it is to-day.

We may observe, finally, that the influence of compassion is as delightful as it is laborious. It leads, indeed, to toil and self-denial; but it leads to no sacrifices or labours which it does not abundantly sweeten. It would, in truth, be a far greater unhappiness to decline them, for that would be to leave a load of misery with its full weight upon the heart: they constitute the only way of lightening the affliction which compassion has created. And when those efforts are successful! The luxury of having removed distress is beyond calculation. The suffering being such as compassion has made our own, the pleasure in the first instance is as great as though we had relieved ourselves; while it is almost incalculably augmented by the generous and elevating consciousness of achieving good, not for ourselves, but for another. Hence springs a delight which repays all sacrifices, which remunerates all toil, and which renders the sufferer a larger contributor to our happiness than we have become to his.

If this representation is not fully realized in ordinary acts of kindness, it is because compassion is so slightly called into exercise; but imagine a case which elicits it more power-

fully, and you will find the whole of it verified. Suppose, for example, that a fire has broken out in your neighbourhood, which, without threatening any peril to you or to your property, puts into imminent hazard, not only the property but the lives of your fellow-creatures. Conceive also, that, instead of the numerous and prompt exertions generally made on such occasions, it happens that you are the only person present to behold the calamity, or the only one able or inclined to act for the sufferers' relief: what, I ask, would be the effect upon you? Doubtless a vivid emotion of compassion. And what would be the influence of this? Would it suffer you to continue in the quiet pursuit of your business or your pleasures, or even to resume the customary slumbers of the night? Would it suffer you to retain a ladder on your premises by which the threatened lives might be preserved, or to keep a well locked up by which the flames might be quelled? Would it suffer you to say, "I can spare no time, I can bear no fatigue, and, above all, I can incur no hazard"? And, if such a calamity were to be protracted to an unusual extent, and its perils to be continued for several days, could you, after a few hours' endeavour, abandon the scene, to forget its griefs, and to return to it no more? Would you, in fine, look back upon such an interruption of your labours, your pleasures, or your repose, with vexation or regret; and not rather, if you had been the means of quenching those flames, or of saving those lives, reckon all that you had sacrificed as nothing in comparison with the good you had achieved, and the felicity you had enjoyed?

2. If these questions admit but of one answer in relation to temporal things, surely the principles on which they proceed must be justly applicable to spiritual things. Here are sinners around us whose condition is scripturally represented in similar colours. They are like "brands" already kindled upon by the flame, and ready to be consumed; and we are exhorted to "save them with fear, pulling them out of the fire." Upon the supposition that I have a due realization of this fact, and that it inspires me with compassion any way proportionate to the intensity of the misery and the imminency of the danger, it will surely be impossible that I should remain inactive. It will be no time for me to ask whether it really is my duty to labour, or for a minister, or any other person, to bring arguments to convince me that it

is so; ere these things could be done I shall be up and doing, at a call which it is needless to enforce, because it is impossible to resist. If there be any whom I may instruct, reprove, or persuade, like my Lord, I shall begin "to teach them many things;" and shall put into requisition whatever time and other means I may possess, to prevent the occurrence of so afflictive an issue. Should it occur to me that I can do nothing, and that I do not know how to act for such a purpose, I shall well examine this point: what, *nothing*, I shall say to myself, is there really *nothing* I can do to save any one of these sinners from hell? Can my destiny be so cruel as to place me in sight of so much misery, and deny me all means of affording relief? Should it be suggested that I have no time, or no opportunity, I shall look narrowly into this particular also. I shall inquire what it is that occupies me, whether, if it be business, a few minutes might not occasionally be withdrawn from it; whether, in truth, business does so entirely engage me as I suppose, or whether there are not portions of leisure, at present devoted to lighter employments, or to personal indulgences, which are available for this more important end; or whether, finally, time might not be acquired by a more strict economy of this precious treasure, and a more resolute prohibition of the trifles or the slumbers by which it is often so voraciously consumed. If, having exerted myself a little for the good of souls, I should seem ready to relapse into inaction, the voice of compassion will arouse me anew; and tell me that, while sinners are still perishing, it is too soon to rest. Or, if I should at any time feel my labours irksome, or my self-denials unwelcome, the aspect of this angel of mercy will at once silence my complaints. O! she will say, is it not to rescue souls from hell that you endure it all? How little it is you endure in comparison with such an object; and how amply will you be recompensed if their salvation be your reward!

Such, dear brethren, is the true and proper influence of compassion for souls, and by the amount of its practical effects we may judge how much of it we possess. Have we *any*? Have we *much*? Does what we think we have operate *consistently* upon us? Do we feel desirous that it should do so? Are we willing to be *whatever* ardent compassion for souls would make us? Or, since its operation would interfere so materially with our present pleasures, and

encroach so largely on our ease and indulgence, do we begin even to dread its approach, and prefer the absence of so disturbing a guest? Alas! celestial visitor! is it thus thou art refused admission to our hearts? And we, is it *we* who imagine that we wish for a revival of religion, and the conversion of our thousands to God? *We wish more to retain our guilty tranquillity undisturbed, though these very thousands perish for ever by our neglect.*

To you, dear friends, who have reason to think that you are in the condition of wretchedness which we confess ought to awaken more compassion in our hearts than we have ever yet felt, we say but one word—*Pity yourselves.* O realize the fact! Is it indeed true that even now you have no happiness, and that such dreadful woes darken your prospect of death and eternity? Are you really beneath the wrath of God, and subject to his utmost vengeance? Is it no more than the breath of life that holds you up from hell? Is it a fact, that before to-morrow you may be lifting up your eyes in unutterable torments, of which there can be no mitigation, and will be no end? These things *are facts*, as certain as that you now live; and they are presented to you with no exaggeration. Are they facts of which you are thoughtless? Have they no influence to check your mirth, to interrupt your worldliness, to disturb your slumbers? You, who are not happy, are you still gay? You, who are on the verge of death, are you frivolous? You, whose hopes and comforts may in a moment be crushed beneath a load of overwhelming woes, are you inconsiderate? And will you continue to be so? Is there nothing in your circumstances that is worthy of reflection? Is it only the body that deserves your care, and not the soul? Is all importance concentrated in the things of time, and none left in those of eternity? Is there anything in this world for which it is worth while to incur so vast a penalty as the sufferings of the next? O think again! Retire once more, or perhaps it may be for the first time, to your secret chamber, and look at the things which are unseen. And, if there is in them a supreme and paramount importance, if there is no concern so urgent as that of fleeing from the wrath to come, yield to the influence of so just a conviction. Flee for refuge to the hope set before you. Is it not a mercy that there is still a refuge for you? Is it not infinitely kind that, after so long

a period has been consumed in sin, the voice of love again proclaims, "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation"? Now also be your day of repentance and of submission; and "to-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart"!

LECTURE V.

EFFORTS FOR THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS A PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN HAPPINESS AND OF GLORY TO GOD.

"That I might by all means save some."—1 *Corinthians* ix. 22.

WE have abundant evidence that the apostle's desire to save sinners was both sincere and ardent. If it should be thought that the peculiarity of his office withdraws this expression of his feelings from a direct application to ourselves, we should reply to such a sentiment, that his longings arose, not from his extraordinary circumstances, but from the ordinary and essential principles of piety. He panted for the conversion of sinners, not because he was an apostle, but because he was a Christian. Upon this point let inquiry be made at his own lips, and we shall find an immediate and satisfactory answer. On the one hand, he tells us that he sought the salvation of souls because it was eminently conducive to the glory of his Lord: "The love of Christ constraineth me," says he; "for to me to live is Christ." He assures us on the other, that he found no occupation so full of pleasure to himself, and that to be restrained in it would have been an affliction almost intolerable: "Woe is unto me," he exclaims, "if I preach not the Gospel." Now every Christian, as truly as Paul himself, is formed to delight in spiritual pleasures, and to be absorbed in the Redeemer's glory; and these principles may be expected in all cases to produce similar effects. There is no just reason why we should feel less strongly for the conversion of men than the apostle did; and, if we are conscious that we do so, the comparison should inspire us with grief and with shame. Let us see if there be not some way of rebuking these cold

hearts of ours, and if they will not answer to the appeal, while we endeavour to show more fully that EFFORTS FOR THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS CONSTITUTE A PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN HAPPINESS, AND OF GLORY TO GOD.

I. In the first place, we observe that *efforts for the conversion of sinners constitute a principal source of Christian happiness.*

In advancing this sentiment, we do not overlook the difficulties more or less connected with such endeavours; but, making a full and even a large allowance for them, we shall have ample evidence that they are far outweighed by the pleasures of the work.

1. We might rest the proof of this upon the fact, that endeavours to convert sinners are an exercise of the characteristic principles of piety. When they are made under right influences (and it is only in such a case that we ascribe to them any happiness at all), they result from the direct operation of spiritual and holy feelings. We try to save souls because we love men, because we love Christ, because we have touching views of the wretchedness of the ungodly and the blessedness of the righteous; in a word, because the whole range of divine and eternal objects, and every part of it, ministers some hallowed excitement to the labour. Now such exertions must be happy, for all exercises of Christian character are so. The principles of piety are made to be the grand springs of action because their influence is happiness, and in order that we may attain it. They are holy, and can produce only blessedness. They are God-like, producing, therefore, blessedness like his own; and they are created within us for the very purpose of diffusing his own felicity in our breasts.

With respect to *some* of the feelings which lead to efforts for the conversion of sinners, it is to be observed that an utterance of them is absolutely necessary to render them a source of happiness at all, and, indeed, to prevent their becoming an occasion of misery. Such, for example, is pre-eminently compassion for souls. Imagine that you are beholding some scene of extreme and heart-rending distress; it excites your commiseration deeply, or, which is the same thing, it makes you unhappy by making the sorrows of another your own. The *immediate* effect of compassion, therefore, is to create pain; and it can yield pleasure only

by leading to activity for the sufferer's relief. If you can do anything to mitigate the anguish, that is your luxury; but, if you cannot, you wisely turn from the sight of it, and strive to forget the existence of an affliction the remembrance of which is exclusively painful. Just such is the operation of compassion for the souls of men. To feel it without expressing it is direct and simple suffering, and this in exact proportion to the intensity of its excitement. The only way to derive happiness from it, or even to avoid its being a source of anguish, is to give it utterance, and to strive for the salvation of those whose lost estate you pity. If, therefore, compassion for sinners does exist as an essential element of gracious character, it clearly follows that endeavours for their conversion must be a direct source of Christian delight.

2. But let us look at such endeavours a little more closely. Our happiness in seeking any object is proportioned to the rectitude of the pursuit, the excellence of the end, the nature of the motives which impel us, or the force of associated considerations. Let us, for a moment, regard labour for the salvation of men in each of these lights.

It is characterized by the highest and most perfect rectitude. It violates no obligations, it interferes with no rights, it trenches upon no province of duty, it sacrifices no man's interest. On the contrary, it fulfils all obligations, and embodies in one act obedience to the whole law. It is loving the Lord our God with all our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves. It is a work, therefore, which we may look upon without any measure either of disappointment or suspicion, and with a most animating consciousness of exalted righteousness.

Nor is the excellence of the object inferior to the rectitude of the endeavour. To seek the conversion of a sinner is to seek the promotion of his highest welfare. It is to aim at accomplishing for him much more than a supply of earthly good, or a deliverance from mortal ill; it is to strive for his redemption from unutterable pangs, and his introduction to celestial joys. It is to labour not for his body, but for his soul, not for the vanishing interests of time, but for the awful ones of eternity. All else that can be done for man is not once to be compared with this. It is this which has engaged the intense regard of the Most High, and awakened

the tenderness of his redeeming love. For this he prolonged the existence of a polluted world; for this he extends the patient administration of his providence, amidst innumerable provocations of his restrained wrath; for this he has reserved his warmest love, he has employed his deepest wisdom, he has expended his amplest resources, he has made the most touching sacrifices. The accomplishment of this end he will consider as a full recompense for all that he has done. It makes the angels in the presence of God rejoice; it kindles raptures in the bosom of the Redeemer, and satisfies him for the unknown travail of his soul; it fills the world above with its most illustrious tenants, and supplies to the almighty Creator the chief revenue of glory from the works of his hands. The excellency of such an object must be immeasurable, and to labour for such an end an almost immeasurable joy.

The motives which stimulate us in such endeavours are of the most delightful kind. It is not fear, nor a mere sense of duty, or of necessity. O no! It is love: love to a perishing brother, whose danger we once shared, as we have now the means of attempting his rescue; and love to a dear Redeemer, who gave himself for us both, and calls on us to aid the purpose of his mercy towards those who are still on the brink of perdition. Can we think it hard to go at such a call? Would it not be afflictive to us to refuse it? And is not everything delightful to which love impels? Does she not sweeten all our toils, and strew the roughest path with flowers? The motives are of the more pleasurable operation because they are not selfish. Without denying that there is pleasure in promoting our own good, it may be truly affirmed that there is more pleasure in promoting another's, and that true happiness increases just in proportion as we are led to throw ourselves, like the most blessed One, into the general welfare, and to find our own joy in the reflection of that we have inspired.

There are also considerations associated with endeavours for the conversion of sinners which materially augment their happiness. The chief of these, perhaps, is, that they are graciously accepted by our Lord and Saviour, as tokens of love and of grateful dedication to his service. In this respect it is not service rendered without a result, nor without a reward. Whatever the issue may be as to the conversion

of particular persons, our labours are in all cases "a sweet savour of Christ unto God, both in them that believe and in them that perish." How blessed a thought it is, that we have done anything which he takes kindly at our hands, and that we have expressed our gratitude in a method which is grateful to him!

3. We have thus far spoken of endeavours to convert sinners independently of their issue; but, if it be happy to labour, how much more to succeed! To become the means of actually converting an ungodly man comprehends an amount of blessedness which it is not easy to describe. The apostle James sets it before us in striking language when he says: "Brethren, if any do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he who turneth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins." *Shall save a soul from death!* We should feel it a great happiness if we had been enabled to rescue a person from the water, or from the fire; but *to save a soul from death*—what an unknown blessedness is this! A *soul*, whose woes would have been unutterable and everlasting; *from death*, those dreadful fires which constitute the second and eternal death! This is a deed of mercy which the Almighty has stretched out his own arm to achieve, and an end which Christ has shed his blood to secure. "And is it really true," you may say within yourself, "is it really true that I also have instrumentally saved a soul from death; that the example I have shown, and the words I have spoken, perhaps with so much fear and feebleness, have been the means of leading a sinner to the Saviour, and snatching him as a brand from the burning? Has anything been accomplished by my poor instrumentality which will bring another soul to glory, and augment the brightness of Immanuel's crown? Wonderful and overwhelming result! Then indeed I have not lived in vain."

Nor is this all. There is a profound delight in being associated with the gratitude and benedictions of our fellow-creatures. When we relieve pressing necessities or severe afflictions, and the sufferers pour their blessings on our heads, it is a luxury seated deep in the heart. How sweet were his footsteps of whom it could be said, "When the eye saw me then it blessed me, when the ear heard me it gave witness to me"! But much more will *they* love you, and

with warmer benedictions will they load you, on whom you have conferred spiritual blessings. Imagine one saying to you: "I was once in the road to death, and might now have been in hell if it had not been for you; it was your conversation and your prayers, your serious warnings and persevering reproofs, which led me to see my danger, and to flee for refuge to the Saviour. I hope I am safe now, and shall ere long arrive in glory; but it is all owing to you, and a thousand blessings be on your head for ever!" Your eyes and your heart become full to overflowing at such an address; and with a bosom oppressed with joy you reply, "Speak of it no more; it is too much. Unite with me in giving thanks to the Giver of all good, who has mercifully made us fellow-heirs of the grace of life!" And if it be thus on earth, how will it be in heaven? How, when you see the sinner whom your present endeavours have turned from his iniquities among the saints in glory; when you behold his beauty of holiness, and hear the melody of his song? How, when he shall again say, "You were the means of bringing me hither!" Your bosom will overflow with gratitude and bliss, and you will derive from it a deep-felt luxury to be cherished for ever in your inmost heart. But, if this, and more than this, will arise from the conversion of *one* sinner, what shall be the blessedness of those who turn *many* to righteousness?

After these observations, may I not fearlessly appeal to you whether efforts for the conversion of sinners be not a direct and very principal source of Christian happiness; and whether the difficulties which attend them are for a moment to be put into comparison with their joys?

The use to be made of this sentiment is obvious. It is to be presumed that we all wish to be happy, and that those of us who are Christians indeed are desirous of *Christian* happiness; since, therefore, efforts for the conversion of sinners are eminently adapted to afford us the pleasures we seek, it may be considered as a matter of course that we shall either commence or extend them. We shall immediately put into practice whatever means may have been hitherto neglected, and see to it that all are employed with persevering diligence. What conclusion would it be possible to draw if this should not be the case? Certainly it must be one of these two; either that we are so strangely constituted as not to desire

happiness, or that piety within us is so languid, or so absent, that we have no taste for its characteristic joys.

What, then, dear brethren, is the effect upon your hearts of the representation I have just made? Does it awaken your desires, and induce a holy resolution? Are you at this moment prepared for labour, and bent upon its commencement? Are you saying, "These are in truth the highest pleasures of life, and to the full measure of the opportunities afforded me I will pursue them"? Are you reproving yourselves for past neglect; repelling the thoughts of indolence or pride which rise against your hallowed purpose; and looking with a fixed anticipation to the earliest season for entering on your blissful employ? It is not too much to hope that *some* of you are so; and to you I say but one word—Cherish these sacred impressions. Carry them to your closet, and let them be deeply confirmed by intercourse with God; then give them full utterance to men, and the Lord grant that you may be abundantly blessed in your deed!

But what shall I say to those of you who feel no such impulse? What a strange condition is yours! You profess to be Christians, and, as such, to have a supreme relish for spiritual pleasures; yet here is a method in which spiritual pleasures pre-eminently abound, which nevertheless you feel no inclination to pursue. Hitherto you have done little or nothing for the conversion of sinners, and little or nothing you mean still to do. You have no purpose of breaking through the habits of sloth and self-indulgence, of timidity or indifference, which have so long kept you silent and inactive in a sinful and dying world. How can these things be? That you are inaccessible to desires after happiness cannot be alleged; your emotions and conduct every day would utterly refute the supposition. The truth is that you have no relish for the *kind* of pleasure which is now set before you. Your state of mind is such that efforts for the conversion of sinners would afford you either no pleasure at all, or so little as not to induce you to encounter the difficulty of making them, or as even to be overbalanced by your love of leisure and of worldly pursuit; and therefore it is that our appeal to you fails of its effect. But what a serious and melancholy state of things this is! You mean, then, to say that, whatever the pleasures of endeavouring to convert

sinner may be, they are not such as you will take any trouble to obtain; and that you prefer the delights of sloth and self-indulgence, of entertaining pursuits or agreeable leisure, of a quiet life and a good reputation with the world. By all means say these things, if you really feel them. It is, indeed, highly important that you should avow them, both for your own information and that of others. What a decisive light it throws upon your character! We know you now, and now surely you know yourselves. Is this the carnal taste which you have been garnishing with sacred pretension, and the state of deadness which you have been disguising by a name to live? Alas for you! Is it possible you should think for a moment that you are a new creature in Christ Jesus, or that your heart is right in the sight of God? Or are you *willing* to delude yourself by the mere show of a profession, which incurs so just a suspicion of resembling the ornamented repository of dead men's bones?

Probably, however, there is among you a class of persons different from both of those whom I have yet noticed. Some of you, perhaps, feel that I have stated influential things, but would confess with shame that their actual influence upon you is very disproportionate to their importance. What a painful and humbling consideration should it be to us, dear brethren, that our piety is so feeble as not to answer more readily to the motives which appeal to its essential principles! Oh the mischief of a languid heart, that it renders insipid the richest cup which is presented to us by our heavenly Father's hand! How earnestly should we seek an invigoration of those decaying graces on which the sweetest joys of piety depend!

Nor is this all. There are some mistakes respecting the method in which religion is adapted to minister to our happiness into which we are very apt to fall, and which it is highly important to rectify. We are liable to suppose, for example, that, as religion produces a most beneficial change upon our own condition, so this is *the whole* of the blessedness it confers. We obtain deliverance from the wrath to come, peace with God, and an inheritance of glory—an immense felicity indeed; but it is not all the felicity to be derived from religion, nor nearly all. Much, very much, is to be drawn from becoming a *blessing to others*, for which religion pre-eminently fits us. There is something

in this which yields a richer delight than being blessed ourselves, inasmuch as the pleasure is more generous. A great part of God's own happiness consists in his being the fountain of good, and it was his design that ours should partake largely of a similar character. If our only or our chief pleasure as Christians arises from the thought of our own salvation, we miss some of the greatest delights of piety. To be happy Christians we must identify ourselves with the spiritual wretchedness which is around us; for we shall be happier in the benefits we impart than in those which we receive.

We are in danger of supposing, too, that the chief pleasures of piety are of a retired and contemplative kind, and that we shall enjoy all that can be expected or desired if we are cultivating fervent communion with God. Far be it from me to depreciate such diligence; would to God it much more abounded! Contemplative piety is of great necessity, but of itself it cannot satisfy. Happiness is not in contemplation, but in action. An indolent man of the world is far less happy than even the world could make him; and a Christian who is indolent as to methods of Christian activity is far less happy than religion can make him. A vivid sense of eternal things directly and most powerfully urges to action; and, unless their influence be so vented, it must ultimately be exhausting and hurtful to the mind. Accordingly, the great pleasures of piety have never been found by monks and hermits, nor shall we find them exclusively in our closets; it is in our families, and in our daily intercourse with the world, that they are most abundantly presented to us. There they invite and will reward our labour. Let us remember, therefore, that the pleasures of piety are in the labours of it, and there let us seek them. I may the more press this entreaty, because complaint is so often made that professors do not find the happiness in religion which they expected. This is probably to be ascribed to the neglect of direct Christian efforts; nor, while the cause continues, can the effect cease. A miserable Christian may be taken as a synonym for an idle one, and the only prescription for his malady is hard labour in the service of his Lord. Only enter into truly Christian labours, and the greater part of your complaints will be speedily forgotten; while sources of rich delight will open themselves to you, new and hitherto unknown.

II. Having seen how forcibly efforts for the conversion of sinners appeal to us on the ground of our own enjoyment, we now turn to a motive of a more generous nature, and consider them as *pre-eminently adapted to bring glory to God*.

An appeal on this ground ought to be a forcible and decisive one. For, if anything be more especially characteristic of true piety, it is a mind absorbed in the divine glory. The carnal mind is enmity to God, and, for its own indulgence, is entirely reckless of his honour. But it is not so with a sinner that is reconciled to him. With him the past is more than enough for disobedience; and henceforth he has but one wish, to serve and to glorify his Maker. If this spirit be not produced, there is in fact no reconciliation to God, there is no true religion; and, as it is involved in the very fact of being reconciled to God, so it is cherished by the whole force of the motives which arise out of the wonders of redeeming love. What can there be distinctive of a pious heart, if it be not the subordination of every pursuit, of every purpose, and of every thought, to the glory of our dying Lord? We repeat, therefore, that an appeal on this ground ought to be one to which every Christian shall immediately and practically answer. It should need only to be proved that efforts for the conversion of sinners do bring glory to God, in order to awaken our slumbering zeal to the fulfilment of every obligation, and the surmounting of every difficulty.

1. Yet what need can there be of proof on such a subject? For conceive, in the first place, that these efforts are successful. What abundant glory to God is brought when a sinner turns from the error of his ways! It is then that an enemy to his Maker lays down his arms, that he renounces his criminal hostility to his righteous Lord, and glorifies him by a willing submission to his blessed dominion. It is then that the God of mercy performs a miracle of grace, and renders his loving-kindness illustrious in the eyes of all worlds, by the forgiveness of multiplied iniquities, and the pardon of a rebel doomed to die. It is then that he achieves a victory of love, and, by the power of almighty grace, triumphs over the stubborn enmity of his foe. It is then that the ranks of his enemies are thinned, and some progress made towards the total extermination of rebellion and of sin. It is then that the dying Saviour receives part of the

recompense of his travail in the day of his agony; that his heart rejoices in the accomplished rescue of the lost; and that his name is loaded with blessings by the newly-redeemed captive of Satan and victim of wrath. It is then that the host of the saints is reinforced, that one heart more glows with the common fire, that one lip more becomes vocal with the common theme, and that one hand more is employed in the common and all-glorious work of hastening the universal triumphs of their Lord. It is then, in fine, that there is born a child of God and an heir of glory, that a pilgrim sets out for the heavenly country over whom there is already joy in the presence of the angels of God, and who shall soon take his station in the midst of them, to glorify God for ever, both by the beauty of his salvation, and the ardour of his praise.

2. Or conceive, in the second place, what doubtless sometimes occurs, that efforts for the conversion of a sinner are not effectual to that end; even then God is glorified by them. For they are in every case a testimony borne for him in the midst of his enemies, declaratory of his supreme exaltation, his equitable rights, his boundless mercy, together with the heinous guilt, the just condemnation, and the ample hopes of a perishing world. Whether men hear or whether they forbear hearing, God is glorified hereby, his character and ways are set in their proper light, and a just rebuke is administered to the wickedness of mankind.

Besides, the attitude of faithful friendship which is thus assumed by his people is also honourable to him. It shows that in our professed love to him there is both sincerity and strength; that we so highly estimate his character and his kindness as to think him a master worth serving, and a friend worth making sacrifices for; that his love has so united us to himself as to identify us with his glory; and to make us think all our concerns and all our interests nothing in comparison with those of his kingdom. Such a spectacle does honour to God in the eyes of the world. It is as though we said to them, "Whatever you may think of God, or however you may hate him, we are his cordial friends, and we make his cause our own."

Imagine only what the result would be if we took a different attitude. Suppose that, in a world where God is almost universally hated and dishonoured, where his name is

blasphemed and his authority trampled upon, and where, moreover, God himself is engaged in a controversy with his enemies, and has adopted a whole system of methods to instruct, to convince, to reprove, and to persuade men, in order to regain his ascendancy over them; suppose, I say, that in such a state of things we remain as uninterested parties, manifesting no sympathy with our Maker, and taking no part in his quarrel; what would the effect of this be? Unquestionably to do him dishonour. It would give a pretext to his enemies to say that his cause was bad, since even his friends did not second it, and that his claims to love were feeble, since those who professed to love him best were not willing either to suffer or to labour for his sake.

Put to yourselves, then, the question, Do I feel for my Maker's honour? Is his glory deeply interesting to me, and more so than any other object? If it be, here is the direction in which I should exert myself. I must instruct, reprove, and exhort, with all long-suffering and patience, and strive that by all means I may save some. Do not say that there are other ways in which you can glorify God, and that therefore you may neglect this. We are called upon to glorify him, not in some only, but in *all* ways which are open to us. We are not allowed to make a selection, nor, if our hearts are right, shall we attempt to do so. The fulfilment of one duty makes no valid apology for the neglect of another, nor by an honest man will it ever be used for this purpose. Least of all in this case could it be so, because, whatever else a man may do for the glory of God, if he does not show a deep interest and take an active part in the conversion of sinners, he neglects one of the principal and most influential modes in which this end should be sought; and, by destroying the consistency of his character, he invalidates also its sincerity.

Neither allow yourselves to be obstructed by any of the hindrances which may meet you in the outset. I know such endeavours may diminish your leisure, may curtail some kinds of pleasure, may involve some labours, and lead you into some difficulties. But, if you shrink from these, I ask you then, *How much* do you feel for the glory of God, which is identified with these exertions, and is to be promoted by them? It has been supposed that, as Christians, and persons laid under infinite obligations to him, we have learned to

regard his glory as the most interesting of all objects, and as one for which we are willing to do everything, to bear everything, and to sacrifice everything. Is this a mistake? And, when our practical devotedness is put so very slightly to the test, is it to vanish like the film of a spider's web? Do we mean to show to the world and to our Maker, that we value more than his glory, not only our lives and possessions (for these we are not called to part with, though others have been so), but our conveniences and our comforts, and even our leisure and our sloth? O! for very shame, let us set such a question as this at rest for ever! If there is anything touching in divine love, if there is anything powerful in deep obligation, if there is anything tender in a renewed heart, if there is anything sincere in solemn professions, O let it be seen in the little proofs which it is permitted us to give of a practical dedication to the glory of our Lord!

What an illustrious and reproving, yet animating instance of the power of these considerations does the character of the apostle present to us! They led *him* to a life of incessant labour and willing sacrifice. Exertions for God and for souls became so identified with his happiness, that they constituted in his view the principal value of life, and the only reason why he wished it to be prolonged. If it had not been for this he would have wished to be in heaven; for, says he, "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better" than continuing on earth, only that, while here, I may preach the Gospel, I may save souls, I may throw myself into the cause of my Redeemer. This consideration, and this alone, created a difficulty, and placed him "in a strait betwixt two," so that he could not tell which to choose, whether to rest from his labours in the presence of his Lord, or to pursue his work in the face of dangers and death below. In his estimation the saving of sinners had weight enough to overbalance, not merely the interests of this world, but the joys of the next. "If I may do this," he was ready to say, "I am willing to live; but, if not, let me die, and this vain world detain me no longer from the bosom of my Saviour." Was he mad, or was he sober? Did he, or did he not, overrate the just force of the motives under which he acted? Did he yield himself to a wild and monstrous enthusiasm, which we, in our more sober wisdom, feel ourselves called upon to condemn; or did

he leave a bright example of just and rational devotedness, adapted to awaken the zeal, and to challenge the imitation, of every succeeding age? Does he stand as a beacon to warn us of the folly of being righteous overmuch; or does he, from the heights of glory, beckon us onward in the path of unquestionable wisdom and unmeasurable bliss? We know the latter is the truth; but when, O when shall we follow the example we applaud?

See, dear friends, to whom I may speak freely as knowing probably that you are strangers to experimental piety, see how powerful the motives are which constrain us to seek your conversion; and see, too, how great will be our reward! Tell us, shall we ever rejoice over *you*? You, whom we have seen so long in carelessness and in sin, and ought to have contemplated with breaking hearts, will you now turn to him that calleth you, and at length submit to his mercy? Is it long enough that you have risked eternal things, and not too soon to make your heaven secure? O permit us to lead you to the Saviour. He is exalted to have compassion, he waits to be gracious unto you, and is plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon him. How shall our hearts rejoice to be the means of leading you to so great a blessedness! And how will you love us too, when we shall be so intimately associated with your present and your eternal joys! But, even if you will not listen, we must plead. While there is hope we must continue to seek your good, and follow you with importunities, even to the very gate of hell. We ought to be able to say that it would make us miserable not to do so. And in any event we shall have our reward. Whether or not we may save you, we shall glorify our God. Whether our instructions be unto you the savour of life unto life or of death unto death, we shall be unto God a sweet savour of Christ, both in them that believe and in them that perish.

LECTURE VI.

THE AWAKENING CHARACTER OF THE PRESENT PERIOD.

“And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.”—*Romans* xiii. 11.

I HAVE hitherto, dear brethren, endeavoured to lead you to direct endeavours for the conversion of sinners by the force of considerations drawn from their state of wretchedness and guilt, from the warrant and encouragement we have to seek their good, from the responsibility which attaches to us for the existence of all misery which we have the means of removing, from the influence of compassion for souls, and from the delight of being thus dedicated to the welfare of men and the glory of God. I would fain hope (but God knoweth) that these topics have not been addressed to you in vain. We turn upon this occasion to some of a different aspect; and, under a conviction that a devout observation of it will afford additional stimulants to your zeal, we solicit your regard to THE AWAKENING CHARACTER OF THE PRESENT PERIOD. God designs to teach us by his providence, as well as by his word. Our Lord complained of the Jews, that they understood not “the signs of the times;” in the passage before us, the apostle plainly represents “knowing the time” as an important part of Christian wisdom; and least of all should such wisdom be overlooked by us, upon whom the ends of the world are come. All that will be needful to the profitableness of our meditations will be, in the first place, to look upon everything in the spirit of ardent piety; and, in the next, to cherish a candid and diffident temper, where accidental causes may so greatly modify the anticipations which we form.

In a general view, the aspect of the present times may safely be described as highly awakening, in its bearing upon all exertions for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ. If in all periods inaction has been wrong, in this above all it is the most egregiously misplaced and inexcusable. Whatever may have been said of the past, *now*, at all events, “it

is high time to awake out of sleep." Among the separate features which enter into the composition of this general aspect, we may notice,

First, THE EXTENSION OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY. After the spirituality of the primitive church, religious liberty was the first victim to the voracity of the man of sin, and with it fell everything else which was valuable to Christianity. Amidst the throes and struggles of the Reformation it had, as it were, a second birth; since that hour it has had many a struggle for its existence; but it has gradually acquired strength, and it never possessed so much vigour as at the present day. It is now that civil degradation is no longer attached to varying creeds and forms of worship, and that every honourable man, whatever be his religious appellation, may lift up his head without meeting the authorized scowl of his neighbours. It is now that the State in a greater measure than ever, though not entirely, ceases to attach a bounty to hypocrisy, or to claim authority over the consciences of men; that it leaves truth to make its own appeal and to fight its own battle, and causes the religious instructor to appear, if not in all cases without temporal allurements, in none with the terror of pains and penalties. It is now, in fine, that the whole land is open to our endeavours, and that, whenever we utter our voice beneath the canopy of heaven, an enlightened government declares no hostile arm shall interfere.

Our facilities for exertion, therefore, are greater than they ever were; a most animating and delightful thought, one would imagine, to every Christian. But what use do we intend to make of it? The extension of religious liberty is favourable to the advancement of Christianity *if it be improved* for this purpose, but of itself it will accomplish nothing. It removes impediments, it opens a door; but what will result from this, if labourers do not enter into the field? There is the more need that we should be jealous of ourselves in this respect, because the natural tendency of the heart is to ease and rest, and, without much watchfulness and spiritual vigour, the entire removal of our difficulties would do little more than lull us into the deeper sleep. How often has it been found that times of persecution have been seasons of far greater activity than times of repose, and that men have done more, and more resolutely, for

Christ in the face of imprisonment and death, than when surrounded with ample facilities for their labour! But do we mean to be thus inconsistent and ungrateful? Have we been crying out of oppression merely through selfish griefs, and can we content ourselves with turning our liberty merely to selfish ends? Does our heavenly Master miscalculate, when he reckons upon such a readiness to labour that he need only say, "Behold I set before you an open door, and no man shall shut it"? Are we disposed to sit still, and fold our hands to sleep? For us, then, religious liberty smiles almost in vain; and, if we could have had only a personal exemption from the evil, the times of persecution are those in which we could contentedly have lived and died. Let it not be said that we are thus unworthy of our freedom, and that we find nothing to do with it but to revel in its sweets. Its chief value is in the opportunity it affords for advancing the interests of mankind, and the glory of our Lord; let it be seen that we know how to estimate it, and that the time when every man *may* labour is a time when *all will* labour for these blessed ends.

Among the awakening features of the present period, we may mention,

Secondly, THE DIFFUSION OF KNOWLEDGE. But a few years ago a very large portion of our population were unable to read. In this respect an immense change has been effected by the operation of Sunday schools, and a variety of kindred institutions; so that now the number of those who cannot read is comparatively small. The demand for books adapted to general information has become immense beyond all precedent, and almost the whole of the lower classes have acquired the habit of exercising their understanding, together with a measure of knowledge, and a facility for increasing it. This is a state of things not to be looked upon without the deepest interest.

For, in the first place, it presents *great encouragement* to our endeavours. In our efforts for a man's salvation it is no advantage to find him ignorant; on the contrary, it is a great impediment. Divine truth appeals primarily to the understanding, in order that it may reach the conscience and the heart; and the better informed the person may be to whom we address it, the more ready in apprehending truth, and the more clear-sighted as to its evidence, tendency, and

adaptation, the greater are the probabilities of our success. The resistance which springs from pride, love of the world, and enmity to God, we shall meet with everywhere; but ignorance adds to all these another and an afflictive obstacle. It aggravates the blindness already existing; it stupefies the conscience, and brutalizes the whole character, reducing man to within a very little of the beasts that perish. If we have a wish for the conversion of sinners, therefore, now is the time for our activity.

To this it must be added, in the second place, that the diffusion of knowledge creates a *loud call* to exertion. We must not too hastily congratulate ourselves upon it. While knowledge is far from being identical with piety, it is, like all other good things, sure to be corrupted by a wicked heart, and turned into an instrument of mischief. Not that such a thought should make us for a moment regret that knowledge is diffused, or check our exertions for this purpose. Who, that had the power of restoring a dumb man to speech, would refrain from doing so lest he should lie or blaspheme? The capacity of goodness is of far too great value to be overbalanced by the possibility, or even by the certainty, of evil. But, at the same time, the certainty that the very best gifts of God—and knowledge is one of them—may and will, by ungodly men, be perverted to mischievous and ruinous ends, should arouse us to the utmost diligence in the use of salutary means. What we have to remember is, that the population around us are lovers of sin and haters of God; that their expanded powers, therefore, will be yielded to the service of the devil, and be made instruments of iniquity; that, having more knowledge, they are just qualified to become more wicked, and to give utterance to their native corruption in more varied and more influential ways; and that, consequently, their increase of knowledge, if unsanctified, will become a positive curse, both for time and for eternity, both to themselves and to others. Are we willing that this should be the case? We, who have in our hands the salt by which the springs of knowledge may be sweetened, and its streams be made to flow through the land richly impregnated with purity and joy, shall we not make ourselves active in casting it into the fountain, which will otherwise convey, to every one that drinks of it, pollution and death? Shall we suffer the eye of him that can read to rest upon

lines of vanity or lewdness, without an attempt to divert his attention to a holier page? The ear and the tongue which are become capable of intelligent conversation, shall we suffer them to be engaged by folly and by sin, without soliciting regard for a worthier guest? Perhaps we have aided in the enlargement of knowledge; shall we take no trouble to prevent the very boon we have given from becoming the heaviest of curses?

It should be remembered, too, that the advocates of irreligion do not lose the opportunity for the advancement of *their* ends. Within the last forty years there has been an unprecedented eagerness in the dissemination of injurious works, especially of such as are adapted to circulate plausible though groundless objections to Christianity, and to make the little knowledge which finds its way into the cottage the means of stupefying the conscience, of corrupting the heart, and of raising prejudices against all that can awaken the one, or purify and bless the other. Individual scoffers are deplorably communicative, nor have there been wanting men who have assumed the name, and with a melancholy zeal have discharged the office, of infidel missionaries; while the poison they so industriously spread gains acceptance from its sweetness to the palate, notwithstanding its deadly influence on the heart. And in the midst of all these things what are we doing? Or what do we mean to do? Do we mean to leave the field which we have been preparing for culture altogether open to the enemy who is sowing the tares? Are those whom we have anxiously waked from the sleep of ignorance to be left a prey to the reckless destroyer of souls, without a proportionate effort for their rescue? Shall the enemy be permitted to scour the country as though it were abandoned by its defenders, while truth is on our side, and we have in our hands the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God? To what everlasting shame should we consign ourselves by such conduct, whether it were cowardice or apathy! Let us but try our strength, and we are sure of victory. Great as the advantage for knowledge is for *them*, it is far greater for *us*. Total ignorance has been the stronghold of Popery; a superficial and incipient knowledge furnishes the momentary shelter of infidelity; but the word of the Lord, as it has dissipated the darkness, will equally destroy the refuges of lies.

In connexion with the extension of religious liberty and the diffusion of knowledge, we must notice,

Thirdly, THE ASPECT OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS. Not that we are about to speak as politicians, but as Christians. Let the potsherds of the earth strive with each other; there is one whose throne is established in *heaven*, and whose kingdom ruleth over all. It is for us to observe *his* ways, and to mark whatever indications they may afford of the accomplishment of his purposes.

No powers have been more hostile to the spread of Christianity than the despotic monarchies of the continent of Europe. They have given their strength and dominion to the beast, that is to say, to the Roman church, or the Man of Sin, and have prostituted themselves to the support of that monstrous usurpation by cruel edicts, and more cruel deeds of massacre and blood. But no one at the present period can seriously survey the state of Europe, without perceiving that her ancient thrones are tottering to their foundation. The profound prostration of the human mind, on which they were originally established, has begun to disappear; and, with however little of open hostility, there exists a powerful under-current of popular feeling, which is undermining the crumbling thrones by removing the sandy basis on which they have reposed. Sovereigns, the last of all people to become wise, sit uneasily on them, watching, with mortal hatred, the many-headed power of public opinion, before which, at no distant period, they seem to know that they are destined to fall. The progress of opinion is already begun, and, notwithstanding all obstacles, it is advancing. How manifestly is it to be seen in France at the present moment; while its convulsive throes are distinctly perceptible in other countries, though partially repressed by the huge weight of civil and religious tyranny, beneath which rulers have sought to bury it as in an eternal grave. But it is in vain. If public opinion were, like volcanic fires, confined within the solid earth, like them, it would move the world. The breast of civilized Europe is now heaving with it; and we may not unjustly compare ourselves to persons standing on volcanic ground ready for an eruption, expecting, at any moment, to hear the subterraneous thunders which say it is coming, and to see the flashing fires which tell them it is come. Such is the method in which at length

Christianity will be avenged of her enemies, and the way will be prepared for the out-pouring of her blessings on the emancipated and rejoicing nations.

In our own country, where, happily, we are differently circumstanced, there is an evident and very hopeful shaking of what is opposed to the spread of pure and undefiled religion. You will here recollect what we have already said as to the extension of religious liberty, and the gradual relinquishment of interference on the part of the State with the empire of conscience and of God. The church establishment, which, with all its alleged advantages, we must claim a right, without offence, to consider as a great national mischief and hindrance to religion, exhibits some promising signs of a tendency to dissolution. Its immense revenues, indeed, which are its life-blood, and by which it links itself with the hopes of every man of ambition, and with the interests of almost all the great families in the kingdom, are perpetuated; but it is losing its hold on public veneration, and is extensively acknowledged to be an inadequate instrument of the country's good. Under the shelter of its all-comprehending profession, there exists an immense, though indefinite, mass of theoretical infidelity, and a yet larger quantity of practical irreligion, two insidious but sure agents in the work of destruction. Clergymen of exemplary character, and persons of consistent piety, indeed, have of late very much increased in her communion: a fact in which, on all accounts, we unfeignedly rejoice. But this only ensures and accelerates her fall. What, indeed, can be a more blessed preparation for it? since it provides a host of devoted labourers who will work when their hire is gone, and will be ready to go through the whole land, in the length and the breadth of it, in the irresistible strength of sacred ardour and unshackled freedom.

With this glance at public affairs we may connect a reference to the lamp of prophecy, yet glimmering as a light in a dark place. We do not pretend to be expert in prophetic interpretation, neither shall we now enter upon it even a single step. To any one who will read the whole scheme of divine predictions, however, whether in the Old Testament or the New, with a little aid from history which any judicious commentator will readily supply, it will be obvious that by far the greater portion of it is already fulfilled. What

remains to be accomplished is comparatively little, and cannot be expected to occupy a long period of time. Besides which, we are assured that the later events of divine providence will be characterized by an unusual rapidity. In the past there was much apparent stagnation and agitating suspense; but in the future there is to be no more delay, but "the mystery of God is to be finished" with a celerity worthy of his final interposition.* Now, if this be the case, and "the mystery of God" is likely to be finished in years comparatively few, then the ultimate triumphs of the Gospel are near at hand. It cannot, in this event, be long before all the kingdoms of the earth bow down to Jehovah, and submit themselves to his Son; the shaking of the nations may be regarded as precursory to the coming of the Lord; and we must be on the very verge of those vigorous conflicts and unprecedented triumphs which are to usher in his everlasting reign.

At what a magnificent and soul-stirring period do we live! For a moment endeavour to realize it. The various objects which have for ages impeded the progress of Christianity are about to give way, and we are but a short way from its universal diffusion. "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." We seem to stand on the confines of both. The day is not come; yet the darkness of the night is fleeing away, the streaks of the dawn appear, the horizon blushes with hope, and we know not when the sun himself may arise. And is this a time for sleep? "They that sleep sleep in the night;" every creature, save the tenants of darkness, wakes with the morning. And shall not *we*? Has not the night been long enough? Is it not the morning which we have been longing and praying for; and now it is at hand must we still slumber? If you must sleep at all, you should have slept before; but at all events sleep not now, lest unawares there break upon you the fulness of the day, and the chorus which is about to burst from every tongue, "Hallelujah! the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

In conjunction with the aspect of public affairs, we rejoice to notice, as another awakening feature of our times,

Fourthly, AN INCIPIENT AND CONCURRENT ACTIVITY IN

* See Rev. x. 6, 7, where the best expositors render, instead of "Time shall be no longer," "There shall be no more delay."

THE CHURCH. Though the *whole* church is far from being awake, it is not altogether asleep. Here and there are individuals arousing themselves, and entering upon devoted labours. Within the last forty years a general impulse of great promise has been given in the direction of missionary effort, which every department of the church has felt, and by which all have been brought into a state of growing harmony. By pitying distant lands, Christians have learned to pity their own; and from the desolate villages they have found their way to the corrupted towns, till some are now found endeavouring to cleanse our polluted streets, and to bless the separate habitations of wickedness. This, therefore, is the time to awake out of sleep. If you had done so a century ago, you might have been alone, like a solitary living being amidst the regions of the dead; and, appalled by the sight, you might have sunk down again in despair. But, if you will awake now, you will behold a scene of cheering activity. Others have awaked before you, and are employed in a work in which they will hail you as fellow-labourers. Shall they labour without you? Will you have no part in the blessed occupation? They have already overcome the difficulties of an incipient effort. The door is open to them, and a wide field is before them. Will you not enter into the gathering of the harvest? The activity of your brethren not only encourages your efforts, but reproves your delay. Why should *they* awake and *you* sleep? Is it less your duty and your privilege than theirs? Have you an exemption from the call? Or is it only that you love your sloth too well to obey it, though it be given by the voice of your acknowledged Lord? They are engaged on a work of immense magnitude and of deep anxiety, in which they want your co-operation; will you not grant it? Can you bear the thought that they are labouring alone, and contending unsupported against the wickedness of the world, while you have an arm or a voice which can be lifted up in their aid? How long shall your brethren be gone forward to meet the enemies of your King, before you think of breaking up your self-indulgence, and hastening with all your powers to their assistance?

Besides, those who have begun to awake are, hitherto, not the many, but the few. The great majority of professing Christians still sleep, and are withholding a great part, per-

haps the whole, of those direct endeavours by which every one should come forth to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Even those whose slumbers are the most effectually broken are scarcely half awake; and it needs continual stimulus to preserve them from a relapse. No state of activity yet exists at all proportionate to the object in view, or adequate to its effective advancement. It is the more imperative, therefore, upon every man who is concerned for the kingdom of Christ, to gird himself for labour. You cannot say, "There are hands enough, and they can do without me." There are *not* hands enough; there is distress for more abundant help. Will you not render it? When Christian efforts are in a state of struggling feebleness, will you perpetuate, or perhaps aggravate, this painful condition by your supineness?

This appeal may be strengthened by observing,

Lastly, THE STATE OF PROGRESS IN WHICH WE FIND CHRISTIANITY ITSELF. In one aspect this may truly be affirmed to be *rejoicingly great*. It is not like an engine which the powers hitherto applied have failed to move; on the contrary, it has already begun to move, and has answered in a very gratifying manner to every effort. Wherever there has been devoted zeal there has been a measure of success; and those who have gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed, already come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them. Not a few blessed fruits are resulting from domestic visitation, while religion is progressively introducing itself into villages and hamlets hitherto abandoned to wickedness and misery. The increase of evangelical labourers in the Establishment has been accompanied by a most cheering extension of pure and undefiled religion there. Nor are the triumphs of Christianity confined to our own country. She has taught some to keep the vigils of the night, amidst the profound sleep into which the churches of central Europe have fallen. She has spanned the circumference of the globe, touching on almost every shore, and effecting a lodgment in almost every land. Millions have heard her voice, and thousands and tens of thousands have partaken of her blessings. And, while this is the attitude of Christianity, is she to have no help? Or rather, is any help to be withheld from her which it is in the power of her friends to render? Is not this the time for awaking out of sleep, when

she begins to assert her claim to universal empire, and plants the standard of her reign in every climate, and upon every shore? if we might be loath to attach ourselves to a stationary or a receding cause, shall we keep aloof from one in the charm of commencing and widely-extending success?

But if, on the one hand, the progress of Christianity is rejoicingly great, on the other *it is afflictively small*. When we compare its actual extent, or its rate of advancement, with the whole work to be accomplished, or the period which seems to be allotted for it, we are led to conclusions of the most painful kind. Over the whole earth there are, perhaps, five hundred missionary stations; yet England itself would be rendered almost desolate, if there were not many times this number in this country alone. At these stations, perhaps, *two* millions of persons may have heard the Gospel, but those who are perishing are *six hundred* millions. Of those who have heard the Gospel, perhaps *fifty thousand* may have been converted; but that is to say that *one million nine hundred and fifty thousand* have rejected it. During the course of a year, perhaps *five thousand* persons may be converted to God; but, proceeding at this rate, it will take *one hundred and sixty thousand* years to convert the world. If the world were to last so long, and the present population of it to live all the time, this process would be most painfully tedious; but we know that three times in a century this whole mass of immortal creatures dies and is reproduced, while we are certain that the world, which has not existed six thousand years yet, has not six, perhaps not above one, more to remain. If, therefore, the world is to be converted, as we believe it is, the work must at some time acquire a rapidity almost immeasurably exceeding its present rate, and in comparison with which we must say that, hitherto, *almost nothing* has been done, or yet is doing.

Let us look at our own country in a similar point of view. What is the progress of religion here? In Jamaica churches of recent origin consist of one or two thousand members, with two or three times as many inquirers after salvation: where is anything like this in England? Survey the very place of your residence, where the labours of several ministers, and of not less than a thousand persons of real piety, are attended with the conversion of perhaps a hundred sinners in the course of a year, without making any general impres-

sion upon the population, or any sensible progress towards its entire conversion. Going on at the present rate, when will all the inhabitants of READING be turned to the Lord?

We cannot hesitate to affirm that the aspect of Christianity in regard to progress, if on the one hand animating, is afflictive on the other. If making progress at all, it creeps, it does not "run;" it struggles, it has not "free course;" it is contemned, it is not "glorified." This state of things ought to be deeply painful to the heart of every Christian, and it is a melancholy sign of superficial or decaying piety when any considerations render us callous to it. How *can* we think with calmness that hitherto a mere fraction of our guilty species have heard the glad tidings of salvation, and that a mere fraction, too, of those who have heard it have received it into their hearts? How *can* we endure, without anguish, to see that a population nominally Christian defies the power of the Gospel, and that, even amidst the abundance of our privileges, the wickedness of the wicked is not coming to an end? If any such progress were making as would speedily accomplish the triumph of Christianity, then we could find no just pretext for repose; but when, with partial and small successes, the main bulwarks which oppose it retain their impregnability and bring us to a stand, are we going to slumber *now*? O, no! nor until her chariot shall have acquired such an impulse as shall send her triumphantly all round the globe.

I have no wish, dear brethren, to act upon your feelings by exaggerated statements, or unreal representations. But, so far as what you have now heard contains what you yourselves must acknowledge to be facts and truth, will you take them home to your hearts? Remember that you are living at a period which affords unprecedented facilities and encouragements to exertion, as well as a loud and urgent call for it, and ask why your heart is not fired at the thought. What would Luther, or Wesley, or Whitefield, have given for such days as these! And are you really resolved to make no improvement of them? Will you still seek your own comfort, or confine yourself to a holy example, while your relatives and servants, your neighbours and friends, are perishing unbesought or unreprieved? Then you should have lived three hundred years ago, and have been buried in some convent where, as now, the Bible might have been *your*

guide to heaven, and have transferred to us some of those nobler spirits whose devotedness was worthier of your times. It is often said to be our *privilege* to live in a day of exertion; but what privilege, if it be not to take part in it? Is it merely to gaze on the labours of others, and to applaud exertions which are continually reproving our slothfulness? Recollect that you stand just where a spirit of ardent consecration is especially required: not in the depth of the night, when it might have been comparatively wasted on the sleeping world; not in the fulness of the day, when it might be conceived unnecessary amidst the universal activity; but between both, when your wakefulness will be of pre-eminent value, both as tending to awaken others, and to give the first impulse to incipient labours. At this moment, too, as your wakefulness will be more especially valuable, so your slothfulness will be pre-eminently mischievous. You might have slept at any other time with less injury than you can now. The stone which is to fill the whole earth begins to move and to increase, and, if you do not aid its progress, you will be an obstruction to it. Cruel thought! My heart, is it thou, who owest thine all, and even thy very self, to the Saviour; is it thou who wilt, by thy selfishness and supineness, be a hindrance to his cause? Rather let me die, than live to such a melancholy end!

There are probably others of you, dear hearers, besides those whom I have been more particularly addressing, for whom it is high time to awake out of sleep. What think *you*, sinner, who have spent so large a part of your life in neglect of the great salvation? Is it long enough that you have slumbered? Or must there be a little more folding of the hands to sleep? Alas! *where* is it you are sleeping? It is on the very brink of eternal perdition. And *what time* is it that you are consuming in such perilous slumbers? It is the accepted time, the day of salvation. Precious time! How large a part of it is gone! The day is far spent, and the night is at hand, the night in which no man can work, the night which brings the blackness of darkness for ever. And are the few moments which remain to you to be also spent in slumber? Have you nothing to do with them but to consume them in the dreamy pleasures of sin? And is nothing to awaken you but that dreadful fall into the burning gulf, amidst the terrors of which you will

sleep no more? You may well stand aghast at the depth of your own folly. What a mercy it is that we may yet say to you, "*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation!" Now, therefore, turn to the Lord that you may live; now, "while it is called TO-DAY:" *to-morrow* you may be for ever undone!

LECTURE VII.

THE PECULIAR ADVANTAGES OF PRIVATE AND INDIVIDUAL EXERTION FOR THE SALVATION OF SOULS.

"And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not; but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."—*Mark* v. 18, 19.

I TRUST you have not forgotten, dear brethren, by what successive appeals I have been endeavouring to lead you to *direct individual exertion* for the conversion of sinners. Have these appeals been attended with any practical efficacy? Have our arguments had any weight with you, or weight proportionate to their value? It is possible that their force may have been diminished by an opinion, more or less latent, that there is not in private endeavours sufficient importance to justify the importunity with which they have been urged. It may be alleged that there exists a public ministry of the Divine Word, which has been appointed by God himself, which is of a far more influential character than private exertions, and to which efforts for the conversion of sinners may satisfactorily, even if they should not in propriety, be left. Now it is too true that these efforts *have been* confined almost exclusively to the official ministry for a long period; and such is the almighty power of habit, that what has not been customary we almost infallibly consider as unnecessary and unimportant. But we can by no means admit the representation by which this state of things is supposed to be justified. We are prepared to maintain on the contrary, that *with direct personal endeavours for conversion*

on the part of private Christians without exception there are connected PECULIAR AND PRE-EMINENT ADVANTAGES.

For an illustration of this sentiment we might refer to the interesting passage which is now before us. The afflicted man out of whom the unclean spirit had been ejected not unnaturally wished to be near his divine benefactor; in part, no doubt, for his own gratification, but in part also for the sake of being directly employed in his service. If this had been the way in which the Lord could have been most effectually served, it is incredible that his request would have been refused: yet "Jesus suffered him not; but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." It was not that his offer of service was declined; but the path of ordinary life was pointed out as that in which it would be most beneficially performed.

It will scarcely be supposed that I can have any wish to depreciate the ministerial office. Few men have shown a disposition to lower the estimation of an office sustained by themselves, even if that now under consideration derived no title to respect from the appointment of its glorious author. On every account it is for us to say, let the office of the ministry have all due honour; but, in strict harmony with this sentiment, we maintain that direct private exertions for conversion possess many peculiar and important advantages.

Here it might be observed in passing, that all the greatest and most essential qualifications of the ministry are possessed by the disciples of Christ universally. It requires, indeed, some *gifts* to be a preacher; but it much more requires *grace*, without which the most splendid gifts are but "as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." A man ought never to be a minister who is not first a Christian, and by far the most important qualifications for the ministry are those which he possesses *as a Christian*. Why, therefore, should there be any exclusive, or even pre-eminent, adaptation to usefulness in the public ministry, when its principal qualifications are neither exclusive nor pre-eminent? It has, indeed, a peculiar fitness to *one part* of the work which Christianity requires to be done, but *only to one part* of it; a very large portion being still left, for which, as we have said, and shall endeavour to show, direct private exertion possesses pre-eminent and important advantages.

I. Let us look at these advantages, first, as they would appear in fact, if the system of direct personal exertion were universally carried into operation.

1. Then, in the first place, *the force brought into action for the conversion of sinners would be greatly increased*; inasmuch as a far larger number of persons would be employed in the work. In proportion to the whole multitude of disciples, the number of those who bear the ministerial character is exceedingly small. We shall perhaps be forming no improbable estimate, if we say that, on the average, for one minister there are a hundred private Christians. And if so, it is manifest that, if the whole body of Christians would strive for the conversion of sinners, the number of labourers would be augmented in the ratio of a hundred to one: a state of things itself constituting an immense advantage, and holding out a promise of most blessed results. If one person may effect something, what may not a hundred do?

2. Then, in the second place, *the number of persons brought under the influence of such efforts would be greatly multiplied*. For there are in the circle of every man's acquaintance, however small it may be, some persons whom the voice of a minister never may be able to reach. Which of you can survey the little sphere in which you might, without any violation of Christian wisdom, use endeavours for the conversion of sinners, without seeing some, and perhaps many, who never hear the Gospel, but notoriously estrange themselves from all probable means of religious improvement? If any one of you, therefore, were diligently to occupy only that little sphere, instruction and reproof would be brought to bear upon some persons to whom the public ministry is rendered void by their cherished neglect: but to what an immense and almost immeasurable extent would the same effect be produced, if every one of the whole body of Christians were to do the same! Such an effort would tend to bring home the truths of salvation to several hundred times, and probably to several thousand times, as many persons as hear them now.

3. It may be added, in the third place, that *the opportunities and modes of exertion would be incalculably augmented*. The opportunities which ministers can embrace of promoting the good of souls, though far from being confined to the preaching of the word, are nevertheless few, when compared

with those which may be employed by Christians in private life. In the domestic circle, for example, whatever may be the station which a pious person may occupy in it, what endless and diversified occasions may be taken of inducing or fostering religious concern! How often may conversation be directed to this end! How instructively and convincingly may the example shine! How expressive and influential may the aspect of the countenance be! How readily may portions of suitable reading be recommended! What convenient seasons will offer themselves for leading to retirement and meditation! Or beyond the domestic circle, in the wider range of relations, friends, and general acquaintance,—how much more may every private Christian do here than can be done for the same persons by any minister, even if his voice could reach them all! There is scarcely a moment or a word, subject of course to the strictest regulations of Christian wisdom, which might not be rendered more or less subservient to the good of souls, and to the pouring in of instruction or persuasion in a thousand channels which are accessible by private intercourse or personal friendship alone.

4. It is one great advantage of the endeavours we are recommending, that *they afford peculiar facilities for insulating the parties concerned*, and for appealing more pointedly to the conscience and the heart. Under the public ministry of the word men are addressed in the mass, and there is a great difficulty in inducing a particular application of general truths; but in private intercourse this impediment does not exist. The party addressed feels that he is so, and, however little he may be disposed to listen, there is a most favourable opportunity of pressing religion home upon his immediate and solemn regard. He cannot hide himself in the crowd, nor evade reproof without a distinct and painful consciousness that he is doing so.

5. Neither should it be forgotten, that the system of direct individual exertion for souls *multiplies to an immense extent the living exemplification of piety*, by which instruction is so much facilitated. Although the personal character of ministers may be more widely known than that of other men, it is still known but to a very few of those whom their voice may address; but, when a Christian presses the great concerns of religion upon those with whom he is in frequent or perpetual intercourse, his example is continually within the observation

of those to whom he speaks, and, if it be a consistent one, it will powerfully second his instructions. It seems to have been particularly with this view that the man who had been possessed with the devil was desired to return, and, rather than any other person, become a pleader for Christ with his friends. They had seen him in his calamitous affliction, and his presence would be a perpetual illustration of the power and grace of the Saviour. Hence the peculiar advantage of his labours, and hence the wisdom of the seemingly unkind decision of our Lord, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them *how great things the Lord hath done for thee*, and hath had compassion on thee."

6. It is another advantage of such efforts, that *their bearing is to a great degree constant*. It is one circumstance that tends to diminish the effect produced by ministers, that their appeals to the conscience are distant from each other. The impressions of the Sabbath are but too subject to be effaced by the occupations of the week, like footsteps upon the sand by the returning tide. The influence of private Christians may be brought to bear in many cases with great frequency, and in some, as in domestic life, with almost entire constancy. Efforts thus continually repeated have a greater probability of success, as the hardest stones are broken by the repetition of moderate strokes; while any advantage which may be gained is in the same method more easily secured. Those who know how difficult it is to make an impression upon "the stony heart" at all, and how much more difficult it is to retain it there, will know also the value of this consideration.

7. Besides, the efforts for conversion made by private Christians *are accompanied by a variety of most favourable influences*. Every Christian sustains some of the relations of life, and whatever he does for the conversion of another carries with it the influence connected with the relations he bears. Now, excepting where it is destroyed by unkindness of general conduct, the influence thus arising is in all cases kindly and powerful. If a child has anything pressed upon him by a parent, it comes with the force of parental authority and love. If a parent has anything properly suggested to him by a child, it cannot but breathe touchingly of filial affection and concern. The same illustration might be applied to all the relations of life, with a force corresponding

with the kindliness which they are adapted to generate, and the actual kindness with which they have been filled. All these influences are important auxiliaries to the cause of Christ, and they give private Christians many advantages over the ministers of the Gospel. One class of influences, indeed, belongs to that relation, and "full proof" should be made of them; but so likewise should it be with all other influences which can be brought to bear on the same end. There are many which ministers can never exert, though private Christians can. To you who are now hearing me I may say, One of you can speak as a parent, another as a child; one as a brother, another as a sister; one as a master or mistress, another as a servant; one as a neighbour, another as a friend: and whatever you may do for the spiritual good of others will have in its favour all the affection and regard which in these several characters you may have acquired. These are powerful influences, as perhaps you have often found, and are quite sure you would find again, if you should have any reason to employ them for temporal ends; remember, therefore, that they give you great advantages for the promotion of religious ends, and advantages which *none but yourselves* can employ.

8. To these considerations it may be added, finally, that efforts for conversion on the part of private Christians *are pre-eminently easy*. It is not necessary that you should go two or three miles to a village, or to a distant part of the town, or even to the end of the street in which you live; your work is in your own house, and at your very feet, all the day long. It requires no neglect of the ordinary duties of life, no absence from your business, no violent effort, no cost of money. The efforts urged upon you are pre-eminently such as you can make *in*, and not *out of*, the common occupations and intercourse of life, without any deviation from diligence in business, propriety of manners, or the necessary wisdom of piety. Such efforts have immense advantages in comparison with any others which can be conceived. Even the most admirable labours of the Christian Instruction Society require some absence from home, and therefore on the part of some persons they are impracticable, while by others they can be carried only to a limited extent. If any one is required to be a stated minister, or a home or a foreign missionary, it is needful that he should give himself up

wholly to the work, and pecuniary resources must be immediately provided for the support of himself and his family; whence the extent of such operations is immediately limited, and within boundaries in many cases most painfully contracted. To how many small congregations would a minister be a blessing, but they cannot maintain one! In how many benighted villages is a preacher needed, but funds cannot be raised! And, although it is most delightful to think that there are in heathen lands missionaries to the number of a thousand, at five hundred different stations, yet even this supply will be felt small to heart-breaking, by any man who will steadily contemplate the immense mass of human sins and miseries for which it is so inadequate a remedy. Now this *inadequate* missionary apparatus consumes pecuniary contributions to the amount of a hundred thousand pounds per annum. The machinery for collecting this money is both cumbrous and costly. It requires a perpetual, and in some cases a very unhealthy, stimulus, to keep up the spirit of contribution to the necessary pitch; and much reason is there to doubt whether, in reference to some objects, it can be long sustained. At all events, there is no probability whatever that the whole earth can be evangelized at the present ratio of expense; and, if devoted men to a sufficient number were to offer themselves, the annual contribution it would require may safely be pronounced both improbable and impracticable. For my own part, I have no other expectation but that the present system of pecuniary collection, to whatever extent it may be carried, will ultimately fall to pieces, and be succeeded by the comparatively inexpensive, but far more effective, method of every man saying to his neighbour, Know thou the Lord. This is a method which may be pushed to the utmost extent without the shadow of a difficulty, and with a most striking economy of time, money, and labour. In such a world as ours, these are no small advantages, and in temporal things they would be highly appreciated. In manufacturing enterprise nothing is more valued than facility of operation, with economy of expenditure and of power. There is no object but religion in the promotion of which men are so heedless of their resources as to squander one part with the hand of a prodigal, while they suffer the other to lie rotting by their side.

It cannot need further illustration to prove to you that

the system of direct personal effort for conversion is one of immense and invaluable power, adapted to produce great effects by the most simple and easy means. View it *as an auxiliary to the public ministry*. What an important preparation it would impart for the reception of the truth! How would it tend to fix what had been heard upon the heart! What an aspect of consistency and reality would it give to the professed object of our office! At present the ministry stands out from the mass of Christians as a thing insulated and detached. We are a body of men paid for attending to some particular matter in which no persons besides think it worth while to take any concern, and there is much suspicion that we do so because we are paid for it alone. How often do the infidel and the worldling cast this reproach in our teeth! How much it tends to sanction the opinion that religion is of no importance in itself, that no persons speak of it but those whose interest it is to do so! How much more chance should we have of being believed, if *your* lips should tell every one that what we have spoken is true! The want of such efforts gives a deplorable weakness to the ministry itself, and the reformation of this evil would be the creation of new strength. And besides this, the efforts of private Christians would complete the cultivation of the field committed to our labour; it would occupy desert spots to which ministers would never come, or would open our way in places hitherto inaccessible to us. It would bring under immediate and most influential instruction an immensely larger number of persons than are reached by all ministerial and missionary efforts put together; while it would give to the whole of Christianity, to every existing professor and to every new convert, an aggressive and operative character, which, in the course of only such a period as that during which missionary societies have been generally patronized, might have gone far towards the conversion of the world.

If, for a moment, the efforts of private Christians be considered *apart from those of the ministry*, their importance will be yet more conspicuous. There can be no hesitation in pronouncing them far more important than the whole official ministry together. They bring into operation a much greater force, they apply it to a much greater extent, with a variety of more favourable influences, with much greater

constancy, and infinitely greater ease. We should never wish to see them separated, but, if we were compelled to choose between a body of active private Christians and a body of devoted ministers, a body of active Christians would be unspeakably the most valuable. If at the present moment the whole existing ministry were to become extinct, and *at the same moment every Christian would but begin to do his duty*, both the church and the world would be immense gainers by the exchange. A body of active Christians would soon reproduce a public ministry; but, when there exists an official ministry with indolent private Christians, there seems no way of remedying this evil, but by stimulant appeals which the great majority seem determined to evade, and which not a few resent and repel.

II. These views of the importance of direct personal efforts will be found to harmonize with all the great principles of the ways and the Word of God.

1. Might it not be expected, for example, that a character of pre-eminent adaptation would be connected with *a system of action so natural*? Every Christian is made capable of using an influence conducive to the spiritual good of others, and, so far as he feels rightly, he is desirous of doing so. How unlikely it is that these ample resources should be produced for nothing! How much is it to be expected that the Gospel will be diffused *in this way*; just as light is reflected from every object that receives it, or as the earth is watered by the drops which distil from the cisterns of the sky. Nothing is more characteristic of the Almighty than to accomplish the greatest objects by the simplest and most natural means, and to avail himself for every purpose of means which already exist, without any appearance of special production for the end.

2. The view we have taken strikingly accords with *the dispersion of pious persons in the social body*. We do not see the operation of renewing grace confined to any particular locality, or to any particular class of men. Converted persons are not all parents, nor all children; they are not all masters, nor all servants; they are not all rich, nor all poor; they do not comprehend the whole of some families, while others are altogether left; but they are scattered through every rank of society, and are found in every relation of life. Every one of them is placed, not in the midst of pious persons,

among whom he might be most happy; but in the midst of ungodly persons, to whom he may be most useful. Now this is not matter of accident, but of design; and the design undoubtedly was to create opportunities of usefulness. In no way could they have been created to so great an extent; and the fact that they have been so created shows that the method of individual action possesses a pre-eminent adaptation to the end. Had it not been so, we might have expected to find a very different arrangement. Our actual position tells us that it is better for us to act, not in companies, but alone; not by others, but by ourselves.

3. It is worthy of observation, also, that *the great majority of converted persons are not only left, but fixed, by divine providence in private situations.* Every one, indeed, is called into a measure of publicity by the requirement of confessing the name of Christ before men; a measure which, by making us like candles on a candlestick or a city on a hill, is highly conducive to our usefulness, while it is by no means destructive of our privacy. Out of every hundred Christians, ninety-nine probably continue to occupy the retired walk in which divine mercy found them; it is only the hundredth that is called to depart from them, and to assume the more public character of the official and stated ministry. From this arrangement of supreme wisdom we may again argue that private efforts for usefulness are more valuable than public ones; and this, too, in the ratio of a hundred to one. If a public station were essential, or even pre-eminently conducive, to usefulness, it is beyond belief that the all-wise God should have made it accessible to so few.

4. A similar conclusion might be drawn from another portion of the divine ways—namely, that *a very small number of pious persons are fitted to occupy public stations with advantage.* It would have been easy for renewing grace to have been directed to the hearts of the learned and the eloquent, had it so seemed good in the sight of God; but we see, on the contrary, that, while some such have been called, they are not many, the great bulk of pious persons consisting of those who are utterly destitute of such qualifications. The want of these gifts, however, disqualifies no man for private exertion. The poorest man, the most stammering tongue, has a fitness unquestionable to speak for God in his own house, and in the path of his daily life. And from

hence it is obvious to conclude, that, while it is advantageous that Christianity should have some prominent advocates, it is more advantageous that the multitude of her host should be scattered in the mass, and employ the sympathies, of ordinary life.

5. *The representations of the Inspired Word* strongly confirm the line of argument we are pursuing. For as it may be observed, on the one hand, that exhortations to activity for God are not confined to ministers of the Gospel, so it will be found, on the other, that no exclusive or extraordinary expectations are attached to their exertions. When it is said, "*Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world,*" the reference is, undoubtedly, not to ministers, but to the whole body of Christ's disciples; and when, therefore, the effect of enlightening and purifying the world shall be produced, it will be by the influence, not of ministers pre-eminently, but of the body. The whole tenour of Scripture language goes to prove, that it is not upon ministers, but upon Christians, that the diffusion of Christianity lies, and that upon them is fixed the main hope of the world, and the chief expectation of their Lord: just in the same way as, in the use of salt, the effect is anticipated, not from a few lumps of greater dimensions occurring occasionally, but from the action of every particle, facilitated by the wide diffusion of the whole. There can be no hesitation in saying that, where our blessed Lord has placed his chief expectation, there lies the principal strength; and if so, then there is a pre-eminent adaptation to success in direct private endeavours for the conversion of sinners.

It may, perhaps, have seemed easy to you, dear brethren, to admit what we have been endeavouring to establish in connexion with *the entire body* of real Christians. *If so large a number of persons would begin to work*, it would clearly produce no inconsiderable effect. You should remember, however, that all bodies of men are made up of individuals, and that the appeal must come home to *your own bosom*. You, my dear hearer, are one of the individuals who go to make up the body of Christians now existing in the world. You allow it to be important that they should all be active for the conversion of souls; then it is proportionately important that every one of them should be so; it is important that *you yourself* should be so. Are you

willing to be so? Will you henceforth apply *yourself* to this great and interesting object, so far as means may be in your hands, and Christian wisdom may sanction your endeavours? I beseech you do not evade this question. If I have said nothing which you feel to have any just force, then disregard all that you have heard; but if, on the contrary, the topics which have been presented to you have an adaptation to convince and to persuade, dismiss them not without an endeavour to appreciate them, and a willingness to yield to them. Are you at this moment convinced that direct personal endeavours for the conversion of sinners are both important and obligatory; that you ought to make them, and that your efforts will have a special adaptation to the end? And with this conviction will you neglect them? Have you already entered upon them? Have you carried them to an extent fully proportionate to your means? If you have not, will you henceforth show more consistent activity? Shall there still be children or servants, relatives or friends, or any perishing sinners, whom you might endeavour to save, but will not? By all that is upright or sincere, by all that is devoted to God or compassionate to man, I beseech you to flee from such guilty inconsistency. And be not angry with the voice which would effectually stimulate you; be angry rather with the sloth and treachery of a heart which can be induced, under any influences, to turn from a path so clearly right, and to resist motives of such overcoming power.

I know that some of you will listen to this appeal; I would fain hope that all of you will do so. But, if any of you should not, I pursue you a little farther with such questions as these. Do you, then, really desire that the work of God should make triumphant progress? Have you any longings for a revival of religion? Do you even wish for the hands of your ministers to be strengthened, and for their labours to be crowned with a large success? Or are you, on the other hand, contented with the present stagnation of Christianity; quite satisfied that no greater impression is made upon the prevailing formality and irreligion of our times, and no more honours won for the Captain of our salvation? Do you wish to perpetuate the deadness of the hypocrite, the scoff of the infidel, the reproach of the blasphemer, the vices of the profligate, the miseries of the

perishing? If you do, the way is before you. Live in your house and neighbourhood as though those who surround you had no souls to be saved, and no sins to be repented of; infuse no savour of piety in your general conversation; let all the ungodly have your sanction for supposing that they are going safe to heaven; and the effect will speedily and extensively follow. But remember, notwithstanding, that you, who are doing this, are the very salt deposited there to shed abroad your savour; that you have in your heart and in your hands the most effectual of all means of rescuing sinners from eternal sorrow; and that the influence which you refuse to exert has a pre-eminent adaptation to accomplish this blessed end. Remember that you prolong the period of Zion's weakness, that you enfeeble the hands of her ministers, and perpetuate the triumphs of her foes. And who are you that do this? If it were an enemy we should feel no astonishment; but you profess to be a friend, an inhabitant of Zion, ransomed from hell by the blood of her Lord, and identified in heart and soul with her interest and her glory. And *is it you?* Alas! such friendship is almost worse than open hostility. What pleasure will the recollection of such a life afford you when it will be solemnly reviewed, or when you shall stand in the presence of your returning Lord? O that I could move you to an instant and persevering activity! O that I could write upon your very hearts the injunction of him we love: "*Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*"

In addressing myself, finally, to you, dear friends, who have no experimental acquaintance with religion, I may first appeal to you whether the representations I have made be not perfectly just. Tell these professors of godliness, whether it is not among the principal stumbling-blocks in your way that they have shown so little concern for your salvation. Tell them whether you have not often thought that religion cannot be of much importance, since no one speaks to you of its value. Tell them whether their silence during the week does not encourage you to neglect the instructions of the Sabbath. Tell them whether, if they and their companion professors were all of them to begin the course of individual effort which has now been urged upon them, it would not be felt powerfully, not only in your heart, but through the

whole town within three days. Perhaps those will believe *your* testimony who will not receive mine. But, whatsoever our neglect may have been, we charge you not to neglect your own souls. Do not judge of them by what we have done for them, but by what He did, who came down from heaven to redeem them from everlasting sorrows. He knew their value, though we do not; and, having shed his blood for your ransom, he now stands before you, able and willing to save. O bow at his feet! Submit to his righteousness! Cleave to his mercy! O that our voices could be united in one tone of earnest importunity, and breathe a vehemence of persuasion proportionate to our past neglects! O sinner, perish not! But flee from the wrath to come!

LECTURE VIII.

THE INTERNAL REQUISITES TO PROPORTIONATE ENDEAVOURS FOR THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS.

“Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak.”—*Jeremiah* i. 6.

FOR seven months, dear brethren, I have been setting before you topics adapted to lead you to personal and individual endeavours for the conversion of sinners. What have you done with those representations? *Have you given them the consideration to which they are entitled?* From the hearing of them have you gone to your chambers, to dwell intently upon the motives which have been addressed to you? Or have you heard only to forget? If you have not made our appeals the matter of subsequent reflection, and bestowed upon them in retirement much more attention than they can have engaged in the sanctuary, we shall neither ask you to estimate their force, nor expect you to exemplify their influence. Unconsidered motives must always be un-influential ones. I ask you what you can think of yourselves, or what you are likely to become, in pursuing such a method. Is this the way in which the things of God ought to be treated?

If, on the contrary, as I would fain hope, the truths which

you have here heard have been the companions of your devotional retirement, if you have looked at them in the light of a present God and a coming eternity, then I ask you *whether they are sufficient for the purpose for which I have adduced them.* Is it enough that I have spoken of the guilty and wretched condition of the world around us; of the warrant and encouragements of our endeavours; of our responsibility for the condition of our fellow-men; of the sources and influences of compassion for souls; of the promotion of our own happiness and the glory of God; of the awakening character of the present period; of the peculiar advantages of personal exertion; and that I have shown how all these considerations combine to quicken your activity? Is it needful that I should say more in order to justify the call which I have addressed to you, and, with some little importunity, have endeavoured to enforce? If more is needful, what more? From whence are additional or more weighty considerations to be drawn; from what aspects of duty or of happiness, of pity or of gratitude, of time or of eternity? Tell me, that I may yet present them to you, before I proceed to a different branch of our subject. But, if your consciences testify that nothing more is necessary, that the motives I have presented to you are adapted to afford an impulse amply sufficient for the activity required, then I ask you once more *whether you are prepared to fulfil the obligation which you acknowledge, and to throw the available energies of your life into efforts for the salvation of men?*

To this inquiry how would my heart rejoice to hear every one of you answer in the affirmative! Perhaps some of you do so. But perhaps, also, some of you are ready to reply in a manner more accordant with the language of the text, which was uttered by the prophet Jeremiah when he was first charged with "the burden of the word of the Lord." "Ah, Lord God!" said he, "behold, I cannot speak." So with reference to a course of habitual endeavour for the conversion of sinners, some of you may be ready to imagine that you cannot enter upon it; that you are not fitted for it; that you have not the courage, the aptness, the talent, which it requires. You perceive that it is right, and even important; but at the same time you tell us that it is of little use to urge it upon you, as, you are sorry to say, it is a kind of life you are not qualified to pursue.

We will endeavour upon the present occasion to meet this class of feelings.

I. In the first place we will take you at your own word, and argue for a moment on the supposition that you are not fit for any considerable activity for the good of others. We ask, then, *whether this ought not to be to you a source of deep and unfeigned affliction*. Consider what the case really is. The exertion of your instrumentality for the conversion of sinners is a matter of primary and paramount obligation; it is a source of the highest felicity; it is the method of your most valuable usefulness; it constitutes your most direct and powerful contribution to the glory of God, and the cause of your Redeemer: and it is *this* for which you are unqualified. Your very heart ought to break while you utter the acknowledgment. To be unfit to discharge an imperative duty, to enjoy the sweetest luxury, to diffuse the greatest benefits, and to extend, in the principal of all methods, the glory of your dying Lord,—this is, or ought to be, a melancholy condition indeed. And in what state must your heart be, if it be not so to you? If any similar disqualification existed as to temporal things, if you found yourself unfit to carry on business, to acquire property, or to earn your bread, your sorrows on this account would flow promptly and copiously; and what is the reason that you can regard your alleged unfitness for the work of your Lord without a similar, and even a more intense, affliction? Perhaps you look upon this not only without anguish, but with a secret complacency, as affording at least a tolerable excuse for your sloth! But, if this be the case, I ask again, what is the state of your heart towards God? Is it not one which ought to make you cry out with sorrow and with shame, “My leanness! my leanness!”

II. Allow us, however, in the second place, to suggest an inquiry whether the supposed disqualification does really exist.

Upon the face of the allegation there is an extreme improbability. You intimate that, though you are, as we hope, Christians indeed, yet you have not an adaptation to diffuse through your circle any beneficial influence upon the ungodly. Can you conceive, however, of a candle that is not fitted to give light; of salt which has no tendency to communicate its saltiness; or of leaven which has no power of transforming the lump? but these are the very names by which God has

designated his people, the representations by which he has exhibited the influential character of piety; and, if the preceding conceptions be altogether out of nature and possibility, not less so is that of a Christian who has no adaptation to convert the sinners within his sphere. It is, indeed, a sentiment which every one of us should use the utmost caution in entertaining of ourselves, since it goes directly to the denial of Christian character altogether. If we were to find something called salt, or something else called a candle, which had no power of imparting light or savour respectively, we should immediately retract the name, and acknowledge our mistake; and by a similar mistake are we called Christians, if it be true that we have no fitness for the conversion of sinners.

Let us see how the fact stands. You are not qualified, you conceive, for habitual endeavours for the conversion of sinners. Wherein, then, do you conceive that qualification to consist? What is it that such a course of action requires, and that you do not possess? If, in reply to this question, you should say that you have no talent for speaking, or that, if you had, you have little influence to engage attention to your words, this, and much more of the same kind, might be instantly and freely admitted. It is no part of our object in these discourses to persuade you that you are either learned, or wealthy, or wise; but rather to convince you that the means of usefulness you have should be faithfully and diligently employed. It is very probable that larger spheres of exertion may be found than yours, and more abundant means of usefulness; but we are not exhorting you to go in search of them. However small, *there is* a circle in which your influence is felt; what we say is, Occupy it for God. However few, you possess *some* means of doing good; we beseech you to be always making use of them. Your tongue may stammer, your path may be retired, your influence may be trifling, your means of action may be small; but still we are entitled to say to you, Employ them *such as they are*. This is, in fact, all that we have been saying to you; and this is the labour upon which you think you cannot enter for want of the necessary requisites. *What, then, may those requisites be?*

The first and most essential of all requisites in seeking the conversion of another is, undoubtedly, *to be converted yourselves*; and if you are not converted yourselves, we have never

intended to exhort you to such an effort. The very attempt would be chargeable with mockery and hypocrisy. But we trust that you have not to make such an acknowledgment. We hope we may venture to assume that you are not strangers to experimental piety, and that you do possess this grand and essential requisite to attempt the salvation of the lost.

We ask, then, *What more is necessary to such labours besides the existence of piety?* And we answer in one word, *nothing but its eminence.* Only cultivate a deep sense of eternal things, a lively impression of the importance of man's spiritual state, a tender compassion for perishing souls, a thorough sympathy with the glory of God, with a warm and affectionate devotedness to the Saviour, and your sense of incapacity will in a great measure, if not altogether, disappear. The fitness which we want is primarily in the state of the heart.

For the purpose of enabling you to ascertain whether this is the fact, let me suggest to you the following inquiries.

Inquire, in the first place, *whether this deep tone of spirituality is not actually wanting in your experience.* Can you say that things which are not seen habitually inspire you with a vivid and solemn feeling proportionate to their magnitude and importance; that the state of man in relation to eternity takes its due superiority in your estimation above the interests of time; that of all his woes you pity with a just excess of tenderness those which are spiritual and everlasting; that your heart is as much identified as it should be with your Maker's honour, and inflamed with your Saviour's love? Happy is it for those who can answer in the affirmative such questions as these! Which of us has not to acknowledge in all these respects a lamentable deficiency?

Inquire, secondly, *whether it is not this conscious want of spirituality that generates the difficulties of which you complain.* Why is it that, when you see a fellow-man, you do not immediately recognize him as an heir of immortality, and think within yourself whether he is ready to die? When you see one who is not, why does not your heart melt with pity, and your thoughts cast about for some method of promoting his spiritual welfare? Why is it that so many persons come within the sphere of your influence without inducing any efforts, or awakening any anxieties? Is it for any other rea-

son than because your heart is in so great a measure carnal, and your mind earthly? Is it not this which makes you overlook the facts which should most deeply interest you, and the opportunities which you should most eagerly improve? Is it not this which, when you do recollect your duty, creates the embarrassment you feel in turning conversation to the subject, or in adopting any other measures for the end desired? What are your hindrances, if these are not?

Inquire, thirdly, *whether, if such a tone of spirituality were to be acquired, it would not materially diminish your difficulties, and perhaps altogether remove them.* Imagine that you became far more deeply impressed with divine things than you have ever been—more afflicted with the wickedness of the wicked, more pitiful for their wretchedness, more zealous for your Lord; what would the effect of this be? Would it not be like a fire within you, irresistibly animating you to labour, and consuming like stubble all the pretexts which now seem to impede you? Would it not quicken your sight, and loose your tongue, and direct your steps among the children of woe? Would it not overcome your scruples, and relieve your embarrassment? Would it not even supersede the necessity of exhortation, and instead of suffering you, as now, to stand unmoved by the weightiest motives and the most urgent importunity, constrain you to go unbidden? Would you not then be likely to say, “These children, these servants, these relations, these neighbours of mine, that are in the high road to death, I *must* try for their salvation: how can I let them alone?”

Inquire, in the next place, *what the difference is between yourselves and those who have been more active than yourselves in this sacred employ.* What were the holy men of old, what were the devoted men of later years, what are the more laborious Christians around you, that you are not? More talented, more influential, more wealthy? Some of them, perhaps, may be so; but they are *all* more pious. They excel you principally in spirituality of mind, and probably in other respects many of them are greatly your inferiors. In them, therefore, learn that the real secret of a devoted life is a devoted heart.

Inquire, lastly, *what is your own state of mind as connected with a less or greater aptness to engage in the efforts enjoined upon you.* Sometimes, it may be presumed, you feel more

disposed than at others to such endeavours. Now, we ask you when is it that you are most ready for them? Is it not when your heart is most deeply affected with divine things; when you most powerfully realize the awfulness of eternity; when you are most ardently exercised with love to your Redeemer? And when is it, on the contrary, that you feel least fitted for such exertions, that you are least watchful of opportunities, and least prompt in improving them? Is it not when your own mind is sunk in dulness and carnality?

These inquiries will probably lead you to the conclusion, that nothing is wanted to silence the plea of unfitness, so far as it is made a pretext for inaction, but a vigorous spirituality of mind. I am sure you believe that, if you lived near to eternity, you would always be ready for exertion. But, if this be really the case, if nothing is wanting to qualify us for occupying our sphere with diligence but a devoted mind, *we surely do not mean to make the absence of this an apology for indolence.* It is itself an evil of no ordinary magnitude, and one for which no valid excuse can be made. We cannot do much for the conversion of sinners, we say, because we are not eminently spiritually minded. But why, then, are we not eminently spiritually minded? *We ought to be so;* and what is the reason that we are not? On this very account we have cause to take shame and confusion of faces to ourselves, that, while eternal things are so vividly presented to us, we should be so grievously beguiled with those which are temporal. And is it this, which is itself the neglect of one duty, that we are going to plead as a justification for the neglect of another? Instead of excusing ourselves from efforts for the conversion of sinners because we are not spiritual enough to undertake them, we ought the more severely to condemn ourselves for a want of spirituality which impedes us in the discharge of so imperative and momentous a duty.

It must be observed, also, that *an eminent degree of spirituality is not less attainable than it is obligatory.* To be deeply solemn, tenderly pitiful, warmly affectionate, and ardently devoted, is all within the compass of Christian character and attainment. What hinders us from being so but an habitual deficiency of regard to the hallowed objects by which these feelings are to be inspired? The germ of every grace is comprehended in the renewed character at its forma-

tion, and they need only the aid of sacred cultivation to accomplish their full development. What, therefore, can we mean by pleading the defective stature of any grace in excuse for neglect of the duty for which it is to qualify us? If we lack wisdom, or any other good thing, let us ask of God, who giveth liberally, and we shall then be fitted for our labour; but, while we make such an unfitness for it a plea for inaction, it looks as though we were averse to the labour itself, and were rather glad of any pretext, however slender, which may seem to screen us from self-condemnation. Let me hope, dear brethren, that none of you will seek shelter from the presence of weighty motives in such guilty subterfuges as these. I am willing to believe that you have too much real piety to do so; but, at all events, you will have too much uprightness and honesty. If you have no other grounds for your inactivity besides the want of heart and resolution, say at once, what is the manifest truth, that you love your slumbers, and do not choose to be disturbed.

III. While, however, dear brethren, I have been endeavouring to impress upon you the truth that nothing but a vigorous spirituality is wanting in order to impel you to devoted efforts for the conversion of sinners, I am equally anxious you should remember that *this itself is really wanting, and is of the utmost necessity.*

I now address myself more especially to those of you who have acknowledged the justice, and in some happy measure have felt the weight, of the considerations I have presented to you. You wish to yield yourselves to their influence, and to pursue the course which has been marked out to you. Your state of mind is highly gratifying; but I beseech you to remember that it is one thing to form purposes, and another to execute them.

However strongly you may be convinced of the obligation and importance of the exertions which have been pressed upon you, or however warmly you may now resolve to enter upon them, all these feelings will be evanescent and unfruitful, unless they are connected with an augmentation of your abiding spirituality. In a very few days, perhaps in a very few hours, you will relapse into the same unobservancy of the spiritual features of those who are around you, and fall under the influence of the same imaginary inability, of which you have had so much experience. If these evils are to be

effectually cured, or even to be materially reduced, they must be traced to their source, and the remedies be applied there. The stronghold of the enemy is within the heart, and from thence, if we are to gain any victory worth the having, he must be dislodged.

Our fitness for every Christian duty bears a uniform and necessary proportion to the vigour of inward piety; and in no respect will this sentiment be found to be more strikingly true, than in relation to an habitual readiness to seek the conversion of sinners.

1. It is only in proportion as we have a high estimate of our own spiritual interests, and a deep sense of the importance of saving a soul from death, that we shall succeed in discerning our opportunities of exertion. These may safely be said to be almost innumerable. We are scarcely ever in circumstances in which we might not be doing something, even if but little, for the spiritual good of others. Yet how far from habitual and powerful is our realization of this fact! We pass not only hours, but perhaps days together, in the total oversight of these opportunities; till at length the habit of overlooking them amounts to a practical annihilation of them. To us they are as though they were not; and, if any one exhorts us to be active, we say with great innocence, There is *no way* for *me* to be useful. A state of lively spirituality is the only thing that will remedy this blindness. Making us *wish* for opportunities of doing good "more than for hid treasure," it will make us *look* for them; and we shall no sooner begin to look for them than we shall find. Only ask the question at every moment, What may I now be doing for others' benefit, and you will have abundant occupation; but when will you ask this question without a more spiritual mind?

2. If lively piety is needful to discern opportunities, it is much more so to improve them. We often perceive that we might be aiming at the good of others, and even that we ought to be so, without acting upon that conviction. We hesitate, perhaps we tremble; while, by irresolution or delay, we see the opportunity pass away unimproved. Shame, fear, our own consciousness of inconsistency, an imagination that it may be done better by some other person, at some other time, or in some other way, with a thousand other things, often prevents an actual effort. And how are they to be

prevented from continuing to do so, and from perpetuating this grievous waste of more than golden treasures? By nothing but deeper piety in our own bosom. These pretexts are to be answered, not by a clear understanding so much as by a feeling heart. See but a sinner sinking into hell as compassionately as you would see a person drowning, and your exertion will be as instantaneous and as powerful.

3. Not less necessary is vigorous piety to instruct us how to present and to bring home divine truth to the heart. An opportunity of conversing profitably with an ungodly person is often lost because we do not know what to say. Suitable topics do not occur to us, nor do we feel ourselves apt and skilful in directing the arrows which are supplied to us by the sacred Word. When conversation is opened, we may, perhaps, be embarrassed, not so much by the objections as by the evasions and excuses of those with whom we converse; and find that we are not ready and effective at pressing home without offence what there may be a manifest wish to forget, or to expose and refute the vain pretexts by which the force of truth is avoided. This also is a matter, not of the understanding, but of the heart. Persons of great talent are utterly unskilful in this business, if they are ignorant of experimental religion; while those who excel in it, though otherwise uninformed, readily acquire the heavenly wisdom. To know how to make divine truth reach the heart of another, the only thing needful is that it should be powerfully applied to your own. If there be sentiments by which your own feelings are strongly and sweetly influenced, there will be little perplexity in the communication of them. Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth will speak; but from what other source can it be supplied?

4. Lively spirituality is equally called for by the diversity with which efforts for usefulness must be made. We shall very soon find that all persons are not accessible in the same method, and that all times are not fitted to the same mode of action. One style is suited to social, and another to private conversation. A person may be approached by a letter, when our way is not open to his ear. Or we may endeavour to lead to a course of profitable reading, where we have brief space for serious converse. In a word, as our means of usefulness are of great variety so are our opportunities, and much of Christian wisdom lies in bringing into

use the weapon most fitted to the occasion. This also will be attained by full-toned piety, which keeps up a remembrance of the ample character of our armoury, and gives a keen eye to the peculiarities of every case in which we may be called to employ it. But it will be attained in no other way.

5. Lastly, and almost above all, a warmly-devoted heart is necessary to the patient perseverance which efforts for spiritual good pre-eminently require. Sinners, unhappily, have no sense of their misery, and give no welcome to those who would relieve it. On the contrary, these efforts are sometimes resented, often unwelcome, and almost always for a time unsuccessful. If they are not perseveringly renewed, no satisfactory result can be expected; yet who can renew them when they are not desired, where time after time you meet with the same unmeaning acquiescence, the same stupid ignorance, the same cherished aversion? Not the man whose heart is lukewarm in the cause of his Saviour, and for the good of souls. No; he will grow weary, and retire. Perseverance in this work demands a strength of consecration, a tenderness of pity, which cannot help weeping while misery lasts, nor labouring while hope endures.

Here, therefore, dear brethren, I am required to urge upon you with the utmost importunity, *the cultivation of a more exalted piety*. I have to entreat you to seek after a general sense of divine things of more vivid impressiveness and realizing power, together with a more vigorous exercise of the particular graces which the labours enforced upon you demand. Be more deeply grieved that the wickedness of the wicked does not come to an end; be more tenderly pitiful of the souls which are perishing around you; be more vehemently jealous for the honour of your Lord.

I cannot imagine that you will ask me *how* all this is to be attained. You know that *meditation is the food of piety*, and the grand source of its strength; and that he who wishes to be an eminent Christian must be familiar with the closet, and the exercises of secret devotion. Allow me to ask how it actually is with you in this respect. Are you men of retirement and prayer? Are there chambers in your dwellings which could bear witness to your fervent meditations and your earnest cries? What is the portion of time and of intensity that you bestow on the contemplation

of things unseen? Are there any of you who, with a form of godliness, are negligent of such endeavours to cultivate its power? In such a case, it is no matter of surprise that your own religion should be declining, and that you should have no spirit for attempting the conversion of others. On every account this negligence of the closet should be renounced; but most especially must it be so, if you wish to acquire any such tone of devoutness as will originate and sustain the exertions we are recommending. Enter therefore, beloved brethren, into your closets, and shut to the door. Be resolute with the numerous but flimsy prettexts of which all hindrances to secret piety are made. Break off a little from the slumbers of the morning; a little more from the domestic or social engagements of the evening; try if you cannot rescue a few moments from the occupations of the day; and, in the space which you thus withdraw from the things of time, place yourself in full view of those of eternity. Employ yourselves, by fixed and deep meditation, in looking at the vast objects of the spiritual world. You will thus be as in the midst of them, and may gaze until the depth of a sinner's misery and guilt, the imminence and terror of the wrath to come, the wonders and the power of redeeming love, the obligation and the blessedness of your Redeemer's service, appear to you in colour and in magnitude such as they really are. Pursue a course like this, and there is no more doubt of your advancing piety than of the growth of grass in the spring, or the ripening of corn in the autumn.

Can it be needful that I should *enforce* this habit upon you? Do you want *motives* to lead you to the adoption of a method to the adaptation and value of which both your consciences and your experience must testify? Let me hope not. At all events I will present to you now but one. It is that *your fitness for accomplishing the conversion of your perishing fellow-sinners is identified with it*. Remain as you are, and you perpetuate the indifference, the irresolution, the inefficiency, which have characterized you so long. Reach but a higher spirituality, and these evils will be immediately lessened, and speedily destroyed; you will be anxious, watchful, prompt, courageous, importunate, and successful. Is it needful to ask which of these you desire to be? Can it be otherwise than your eager desire, will it be otherwise than

your unspeakable joy, to be happily qualified for the discharge of so important a duty, for the diffusion of such inestimable benefits, for the attainment of such exquisite delights? Is all that is necessary to make you one of the happiest of men, and one of the greatest benefactors of your race, a habit of more extended retirement, and of greater familiarity with the world to come? And will you not grasp such a felicity? I am sure that some of you will do so. This evening, and every day henceforth, shall your chosen solitudes witness your deeper lamentation that so much guilty unfitness for such a work should remain in you, and your determined efforts and earnest supplications for a state of mind congenial at once with your obligations and your privileges. Go, beloved brethren! and may the God of all grace meet you in mercy there!

I may not assume, however, that you *all* enter into this resolution. It is too common to perceive and acknowledge that a thing is very important, and yet to leave it undone. If there are any of you who now hear me whose feelings repel the importunity with which I have addressed you, who mean still to plead that you are, although thus criminally unqualified to attempt the conversion of sinners, and willing to continue so, I can only entreat you to consider what is the import of such an attitude. It is nothing, then, to you, that God is dishonoured, or that sinners perish; it is nothing that your Redeemer is despised, and hell glutted in his very presence with victims of wrath; it is nothing, at least, in comparison with your own ease and indulgence. All this you find it much more easy to bear, than to enter into your closet, and submit yourselves to the influences of things which would awaken you to the necessity of exertion, and nerve you for its accomplishment. Is it not manifest, then, that you have no prevailing sympathy with the cause of Christ, no love for his work; and that the very want of qualification which you speak of with the semblance of regret, you really regard with complacency and gratulation, as a piece of good fortune which enables you to evade all stimulant appeals, and to repel every summons to labour? Verily you seem to wrap yourself in this delusion as though there was none that knew the secrets of the heart, or could trace your ways of self-deceit: yet there is ONE to whose eye all is open now, and before whose face all will be exposed at

last ; and not for a thousand worlds should your situation be mine.

I have now finished this discourse, so far as the consideration of its appropriate subject is concerned. But perhaps some of you, dear hearers, are come to hear a discourse on the revival of religion who have as yet no religion yourselves. It may be you are still in ways of vanity and sin, and therefore in the way to death ; and lest, while individual Christians are so unapt to fulfil their duty towards you, there should be no other opportunity for a *minister* to address you before you fall into everlasting ruin, allow me to say to you a few words. What a melancholy fact it is that you have no religion ; that your hearts are destitute of all due regard to eternal things, and of all right dispositions towards your Maker ! Does it not afflict you ? *Why* have you no religion ? Why is your heart alive to this world and dead to the next ? Why do the trifles of time move you, and not the momentous things of eternity ? Is it not madness ? It is worse than madness ; it is wickedness. It is that you are averse to your Maker and his service. It is that you wish to shelter yourself from everything which might disturb your course of self-indulgence and worldly pursuit. How long shall this wicked obstinacy last ? How long is it possible you can preserve any esteem for yourselves, or be insensible to the abhorrence of your Maker ? How long will you not learn rather to abhor yourselves, and, in humiliation deeper than dust and ashes ever expressed, to adopt the language, "Behold, I am vile ; God me merciful to a sinner !"

LECTURE IX.

THE INDIRECT MEANS OF CONVERTING SINNERS.

"Ye are the light of the world. . . . Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."—*Matthew* v. 14 and 16.

WE are now to proceed, dear brethren, to consider THE MEANS which may be employed for the conversion of sinners. I must take it for granted, therefore, that the motives which

I have so long been pressing upon you have been rightly estimated, and that under their influence you are ready to labour in the method which may be opened to you. Is it true that you are so? Or shall I herein be making an assumption more pleasing than the actual state of your minds will justify? But, be the case as it may, I must turn to other topics; observing only that, while we are not accountable to each other for the influence of the quickening considerations addressed to us, we shall have a solemn account to render, at a future day, to him who searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins.

The means which may be employed for the conversion of sinners are of great variety; but our contemplation of them will become more easy by noticing two principal classes into which they divide themselves. The end may be promoted either by direct efforts of instruction and persuasion, or by the silent yet powerful influence of example. The latter species of exertion constitutes what we have called *the indirect means of converting sinners*, and forms the subject of the present discourse.

The duty of rendering personal and individual piety as exemplary and influential as possible, is strikingly exhibited in the passage before us. It was of his disciples universally that the Redeemer said—"Ye are the light of the world," and he added—"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." It is obvious that our Lord here asserts the adaptation of exemplary character to impart instruction, as a lamp diffuses light; and that he enjoins such a cultivation and manifestation of piety as may be most powerfully conducive to this end. Let us notice, in the first place, the value of the efforts thus enjoined; and in the second, the method in which the injunction may be fulfilled.

I. We notice, in the first place, *the value of the efforts here enjoined.*

1. Endeavours to convert sinners by the force of example have a general and obvious value, arising from *the well known force of example itself.* Although no person is constrained to imitate another, yet a very strong tendency to imitation exists in our nature, and it operates through the whole of life. It is by virtue of this tendency that we acquire the art of walking, of speaking, of writing, and

almost every other; the portion of originality and invention belonging to the great majority of men being extremely small, and by no means large in proportion to acquirements by imitation even in the most elevated minds. To the same cause is to be ascribed the wide prevalence of anything which once becomes fashionable, and the surprising perpetuity of local customs from age to age. Now, although, through the depravity of our fallen race, there is a much greater aptness to follow evil example than good, yet the constitution of our nature is not altered as to the influence of example itself; and the force of this instrument is as available for good as for evil.

The method in which exemplary piety is adapted to operate is not difficult of illustration. It conveys *instruction*. It tends to show an ungodly person, for instance, that all men are not alike, but that there is an actual difference in the character and happiness of men far exceeding what may be ascribed to the force of circumstances or diversity of constitution. He will not be long before he is constrained to ascribe this difference to religion, its only adequate, and its real, cause; and thus he learns some of the most important truths. He finds that religion is not a mere name, a form, a pretext, a farce, as it has often been considered; but that it is a reality, a thing of power and practical energy. He finds, too, that religion is not merely powerful, but excellent; that it gives birth to principles of the very highest worth, that it forms a character of very superior excellency, and that it opens sources of most exalted pleasure. He sees that it imparts fitness for every station; that it guards its possessor equally against intoxication in prosperity and depression in adversity, and that it provides him alike with the energies required in life and the consolations necessary in death. He learns, moreover, the practicability of piety. He beholds before him a man who has actually become wise unto salvation, who has really conquered his once reigning passions, and overcome the long fascinating world; he can no longer say, therefore, that such things are impossible, and that we are born under a tyranny which it is hopeless to resist. Now whatever teaches lessons like these is inestimably eloquent; for these are truths in the knowledge of which true wisdom begins, and in imparting which the most eloquent of men might be happy to expend his utmost powers.

You must frequently have observed the influence of correct example in conveying, not only instruction, but *reproof*. When persons are placed in similar circumstances with ourselves, we naturally set their conduct in comparison, or in contrast, with our own; and hence the observation of the exemplary demeanour of others has a direct tendency to exhibit to us our own faults. It is in this way that a censorious spirit (to quote a single instance for illustration) has often been rebuked by the mere exercise of candour in another; and on many occasions the influence of an exemplary person is so powerful, that his very presence not only reproofs, but banishes, as by a heavenly light, innumerable evils, which come forth unblushingly in a more congenial darkness. Holy example, therefore, tends to induce such reflections as these: "This man is right, and I am wrong; he is aiming at what he ought to be, I am willingly what I ought not to be: and I ought to be a different man."

Besides, example generates a powerful *attraction*. What we value in the condition of others we naturally desire for ourselves. "Such an one is going to heaven," will an irreligious person, perhaps, say; "and why should not I? My acquaintance has broken the bands of dissipation; how miserable it is that I should still be enthralled by them! I see a neighbour turned to the Lord; I wish I were so too! Why are they escaping on every side of me from the wrath to come, and leaving me behind to perish in my sins? How many people are happy in the possession of substantial joys and blessed hopes, while I have only present anguish and future woe! I will arise, and go unto my Father."

2. If endeavours to convert sinners by the force of example derive a general value from the acknowledged force of example itself, they will be found to possess a special value also, arising from *a comparison of them with other means which may be employed for the same end*.

The lessons inculcated by example are peculiarly *convincing*. In the oral communication of religious instruction you may be met by many objections, which, if you should not find it difficult to answer, you may find it impossible to silence; or you may even be suspected of a want of honesty and sincerity, as though you did not really attach to religion the value you express. But instruction by example obviates these difficulties. There is a substantial, matter-of-fact

character about the lessons thus imparted, which brings them quite home to the understanding, and answers at once all imaginable objections. It stamps the teacher with the character of an honest man, and renders it impossible to suppose that he is recommending what he does not practise. To illustrate this representation, I need refer only to the controversy which has been agitated whether Christianity has done most good or harm in the world: a question respecting which much has been found to be said on both sides, and which, as a matter of argument, is undecided still. If every Christian had been an exemplary one, this question never could have been asked; and, when every Christian shall be an exemplary one, it never can be asked again.

The influence of example, unlike that of any other mode of instruction, may be *perpetual*. You cannot be always speaking, or using any other direct means of spiritual good, but you may be every moment exhibiting the beneficial aspects of pure and undefiled religion. Whether in the concerns of the family or the engagements of business, whether in select society or in the crowded streets, you may everywhere be, and appear to be, a Christian indeed. Your light, like that of the stars, or even like that of the sun by which their radiance is kindled, may be ever shining, and your good works and heavenly tempers be always visible. This method of endeavour for converting sinners, therefore, is one from which your hand need never be withdrawn, since it is adapted, without interrupting any of your employments, to run through them all.

The influence of example may also be carried to a *much wider extent* than any other mode of exertion. Those to whom we can personally address ourselves on the great subject of religion are comparatively few; while those to whom our character may speak are far more numerous. We may thus instruct or reprove every one in whose company we remain long enough to exhibit the aspect of piety, and undoubtedly many to whom we can have no other means of approach, if not also many who may not be accessible by any other means of benefit at all. Like a lamp in a dark place, we may enlighten, not merely the ordinary residents, but the stranger or the chance passenger who may but once cast his eye on the light.

Endeavours to do good by the influence of example are

pre-eminently *inoffensive*. It may be doubtful on some occasions whether a more direct attempt would not be resented as an unwarrantable freedom, and so, perhaps, do harm instead of good. But no man can avow himself offended with the eloquence of a bright example. Without provoking any resentment, your perpetual cheerfulness may teach the worldling his misery, your elevated aim may discover the baseness of his pursuits, your fervent benevolence may reprove his selfishness. In such efforts, therefore, you enjoy an unquestionable safety for yourselves; and, what is much more valuable, you disarm those whom you would benefit of the weapons by which they might foil your endeavour, and convert it into an injury.

It is a further recommendation of the force of example, that, as it cannot be resented, so *it cannot be avoided*. Even those with whom you are most intimate may refuse to lend you their ear, when you would occupy it with solemn and unwelcome topics; but they cannot with equal ease turn away their eyes from the light which may shine in your general deportment. This they must see, however unwilling they may be to acknowledge its excellency, or to yield to its force; and we may indulge no unreasonable hope that admonitions thus continually received will finally prevail.

Once more, endeavours to convert sinners by the force of example are peculiarly *easy*. In more direct exertions we often allege that we find difficulty; we do not know how to open a conversation, or what topics to select, or how to remove perplexities. But the exhibition of an instructive example encounters no such obstructions. It requires us only to be what we ought to be, namely, of correct and exemplary piety. It calls for nothing but a just and obligatory discipline of our own heart and character. Only be an eminent Christian, and you will thus be using a means powerfully adapted for the conversion of sinners, without any difficulty to encounter but such as may arise within your own breast.

3. Endeavours to convert sinners by the force of example derive a still higher value from *the stress which is laid upon them by our blessed Lord*.

It seems evident that he has the effect of example particularly in his eye, when he says of his disciples in every age, "Ye are the light of the world," since he immediately

conjoins this declaration with a command, that our light should "*so shine before men that they may see our good works.*" It is manifest, therefore, that he has assigned to exemplary piety a very important share in the actual conversion of the world, and that he has large expectations from it. Now, doubtless, he estimates everything according to its true value, and would never have given sanction to such an idea respecting the importance and efficacy of a bright example, if it had not been according to truth.

It should be observed, also, that he has done everything to render the influence of our example extensive and decisive. He has not suffered us to remain unknown in the wicked world from which he has separated us, and to tread an obscure path to his kingdom; but, by calling upon every disciple to make a public profession of his name, he brings us into a more conspicuous situation for the very purpose of our being more extensively seen. Hence he describes his church as "a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid;" and uses the following familiar, but striking, illustration: "Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." Such is one of the great purposes of our religious profession; it sets the candle on a candlestick, that its light may be more widely diffused. There is named on us the name of Christ in order that there may be fixed upon us the observation of men; and, because the exhibition of exemplary piety is adapted to be a benefit to the world, the professors of it are elevated in order that they may engage the more attentive regard.

What, then, shall we say to these things? The force of example is a means of converting sinners powerful in itself, peculiarly powerful in comparison with every other, and much relied upon by our Lord Jesus Christ. Is it a means which we are ready to employ? And are our hearts in unison with the injunction, "Let your light shine before men"?

II. We notice, in the second place, *the method in which this injunction may be fulfilled.*

Here it may be observed in passing, that the text affords no sanction whatever to a spirit of forwardness and ostentation. It is our *light* which is to shine, not ourselves; and this is so to shine, not that *we* may be glorified by it, but

our Father who is in heaven. A spirit of humility and modesty, therefore, is strongly enjoined by the language itself. No small part of the splendour of piety consists in practical self-abasement, and it is above all things essential to its usefulness that the light of our Father's glory should conceal in its brightness the instrument by which it is exhibited.

1. The fulfilment of our Lord's injunction requires, in the first place, *the cultivation* of exemplary piety. We are placed in such a manner that our character will inevitably appear; so that the precept, "Let your light shine," might seem to be little more than this, Let it be kept in unsullied brightness. If a lamp is to be serviceable, it is above all things needful that it should burn brightly and steadily; otherwise it may, indeed, just be visible in the darkness, but it will be of no more value to the passenger than if it were altogether extinct. So with respect to personal piety; however prominently it may be exhibited, it cannot answer the purpose of a light if it has not a happy degree of consistency. An inconsistent example, and even a materially defective one, serves rather, like a dim lamp, to increase perplexities, and to present the greater obstacles to exertion.

Character, to be exemplary, should be complete. No part of it looks well alone. There is great importance in the sterner virtues of self-denial, integrity, and fortitude; but there is scarcely less importance in the milder graces of courteousness, meekness, and compassion. The latter without the former have an aspect of unattractive debility, the former without the latter an aspect of repulsive strength. Like a landscape or a building, religion never appears to advantage in fragments. It is far more beautiful when seen as a whole; as the sternness of the mountain height increases the loveliness of the cultivated valley, or as all the parts of an edifice must be beheld in combination in order to exhibit the wisdom and beauty of the general design.

Exemplary piety must also be eminent. No man who wishes his example to be beneficial should content himself with being merely a *sincere* Christian. This undoubtedly is of infinite importance; but it goes a very little way towards fulfilling the injunction now before us. Sincerity is compatible with many and great imperfections; but great imperfections, though they do not impugn the reality of piety, not

only diminish, but destroy, its exemplariness. Metal has its value in the mass, but it is only the polished surface which is available as a mirror. One considerable fault may ruin the influence of an otherwise admirable character. Though a man may possess in high perfection almost every Christian grace, the existence of a single glaring defect—suppose covetousness, for instance, or any other—obscures the whole, and the value of his character as an example is totally lost. Nor is the effect of many smaller faults at all less injurious. A person who, without any remarkable failing, is scarcely in any respect near enough what he ought to be worthy of imitation, is as unfit for an example as a surface which has been smoothed, but not polished, is for a mirror.

It should be recollected, too, that *the great beauty of piety consists in little things*; that is to say, in its great principles being carried into minute operation. Actions comparatively trivial constitute by far the greater part of life, and by their perpetual recurrence present the most considerable materials of observation to those around us. They afford also the most delicate tests of character, by showing the high finish to which it is wrought. Religion must, indeed, have a basis of substantial virtues, just as a house must have a solid foundation; but as the beauty of an edifice consists, not in the strength of its foundation, but in the perfection of the workmanship in its subordinate parts, so the principal charm of Christian character arises from the style of its minuter portions. The words, the manners, and even the looks, of a professing Christian, may more materially influence the general aspect and estimation of his piety than the whole body of substantial virtue.

The value of piety as an example depends not so much upon its reality, as upon the manner of its exercise; not so much upon what we are, as upon what we appear to be. There is a possibility of doing very Christian things in a very unchristian manner, and of investing religion, angel of light as she is, with such a mantle of unloveliness as to conceal almost her whole title to esteem. Charity may be given with a scowl; integrity may be clothed in moroseness; resolution may imitate self-will; and prudence may wear the aspect of timidity. It should be our endeavour to avoid such an evil; and, while we should be far from assuming merely the appearance of a virtue in its real absence, we should be equally

anxious to honour virtue itself by exhibiting it in a manner worthy of its excellence.

The result of these observations is that, if we would have our light shine beneficially before men, our character must be wisely and sedulously cultivated. We must maintain a high and steady aim at the glory of God and the good of men in all things; a decided and consistent nonconformity to the world, without censoriousness or harshness; an elevated and continual spirituality of mind, apart from austerity or gloominess; a well-governed tongue and temper, both on ordinary and extraordinary occasions; together with a general deportment characterized by a happy combination of gravity and cheerfulness. To these should be added a watchful readiness for such peculiar exercises of the Christian temper as our individual circumstances may demand; that we may rule without severity, and obey without reluctance; that we may be faithful to every trust, and patient under every injury; that we may be temperate in prosperity, and resigned in affliction, knowing how, with the apostle, both to abound and to suffer need.

2. The fulfilment of our Lord's injunction requires, not only the cultivation of eminent piety, but *the intentional exhibition of it*. He says not merely, Let your light burn brightly: but, "Let your light *shine before men*."

We are called upon, therefore, *to cherish a continual endeavour that our example may be as much adapted as possible to the spiritual good of others*. Upon a moment's consideration, it will be manifest that it may be rendered more or less so, without any material alteration of our character itself, by the pains we take, or neglect to take, for this end. It does not at all follow that a man's example will be as influential as it might be merely because he is an eminent Christian; just as it is not the brilliancy of a light which determines the benefit it shall afford, but the wisdom and care with which it is exhibited. It is plainly incumbent upon us, therefore, even if we were all that we ought to be, not to content ourselves with whatever good our example may chance to effect without our effort; but, on the contrary, to recollect habitually that our example is a means of exertion put into our hands of which we are to make a studious and diligent use. We should always be trying to do good with it. In every company it should be our inquiry,

What good may my example now be promoting; who are those around me; what do they most need to learn; and what aspect of piety can I present to them with the greatest benefit? You will find a much greater scope for such exertion than you may imagine; some you may aim to convince of the happiness of religion, others of the worth of integrity and truth; to some you may show the value of godliness by your tranquil submissiveness in affliction, and to others by your guarded firmness in the midst of temptation.

According to the words of our Lord, *we should make it our business to show our religion everywhere, and under all circumstances.* It is a general maxim in the world that a man should accommodate himself to his company; and this rule is too frequently acted upon to a very sinful extent by professors of religion. We can let our piety appear or disappear, according to circumstances; as though we carried it in a sort of dark lantern, by which the light of it might be alternately exhibited and concealed. Very perceptibly pious in some companies, in others, perhaps, we may be for hours or days without giving any person reason to suspect it. We fear, in the presence of worldly men, to make any such acknowledgment to God, to give any such general indications of spirituality, or to show any such anxiety for religious objects, as might attract notice, or, possibly, occasion ridicule. No doubt, this is the easiest way of passing through the world; but it is a course which our divine Lord expressly forbids. "Let your light shine," says he; but this is hiding it, and hiding it to a degree which not only greatly diminishes the force of our example, but to a considerable extent annihilates it. These people, before whom we conceal our character, are pre-eminently those whom we should endeavour to benefit by it; yet, by shrinking from observation, we totally abandon the effort.

Our Lord's words enjoin *a just solicitude respecting public opinion.* They are directly contrary to a sentiment which we hear in the mouths of some professors: "I do not care what men may think of me; I know what I am." There is a very imposing air of independence about such language; and, if it is meant only to say that, as to the actual judgment of character, we appeal from all human tribunals to the Divine, it is just; but whatever goes beyond this is fallacious and unchristian. Since the opinion which men form

of our conduct may be either beneficial or injurious to them, it ought to be a matter of anxiety to us what they think of it; and no pains should be spared by us to avoid every appearance of evil, and to take from them every pretext, however groundless, by which the instructive efficacy of our example might be diminished.

Behold, then, dear brethren, *one* of the means we possess for the conversion of sinners. "Let your light so shine before men." Shall we employ it? We ought to esteem it a privilege of no ordinary value to have the opportunity of promoting so estimable an end by such simple means. Are we prepared for the effort? I call it an effort, for it will in reality be one. Very little good is done inadvertently, or by accident. It requires design. And the maintenance of a perpetual design to be doing good is one of the hardest of all things. Amidst unnumbered methods of occupation and enjoyment it is extremely apt to be forgotten, even if, when remembered, it would not be uninfluential and unwelcome. What have we done in this direction in days that are past? Perhaps nothing; certainly far less than we ought. Which of us has realized the adaptation and capacity of this sacred weapon to the work of conversion, and with any adequate attention applied it to this end? Has not our anxiety respecting our example been very much confined to the prevention of such inconsistencies as might do mischief? Even on this score, perhaps, we have not been very solicitous, or very successful. Does not our present meditation recall to every one of us much matter for humiliation and regret? What a grievous thing it is, by our unguarded levity, by our ungoverned passion, by our uncorrected infirmities, to have obscured the light of truth and the excellence of piety, to have afforded a sanction to error and confirmation to wickedness, or to have allowed any person to say that we are saints at one time and like the rest of the world at another! But we are now called upon to regard our example in a much higher point of view. It is enjoined upon us to give it, not merely a character of negative excellence so that it may do no harm, but one of positive excellence in order that it may do good; and, if the former has required more diligence and labour than we have hitherto applied to it, how much more will be necessary to the latter. Without effort, similar matter for repentance will be furnished by every day that is to

come; and, while the Saviour who gave himself for us, and to whom we have given ourselves, calls us to participate in so glorious a work as the salvation of souls, we shall let the opportunity slip, and drop the instrument from our hands. Do we mean to do so? If we should do so, what will the reasons be but a reluctance to the labour, and an affectionate tolerance of imperfection, which to every sincere Christian ought to be impossible? One thing is certain. If our example does not do good, it will do mischief. It will be either a blessing or a curse. Do not let us imagine that it can be neutral. If our conduct does not reprove sin, it will sanction it; if it does not teach men that there is excellence in religion, it will confirm them in the belief that it has no value at all. What a solemn, what a dreadful, alternative is this! Surely the very idea of such a baneful influence is intolerable to us. Enter into your closets, therefore, beloved brethren, and commence a holier work. "Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

It is probable that those of you, dear hearers, who are destitute of the power of godliness, may be ready to say that I have now pointed out the great reason why religion makes so little progress. You are prepared to allege, perhaps, that you yourselves should have paid attention to it before now, had you found reason to think that it did any one any good; but that, while you see persons who make a profession of religion no way materially different from those who do not, and some of them guilty of gross inconsistencies, you feel justly excused for your neglect.

While I acknowledge, with deep regret, that professors of religion have afforded you too much occasion for such language, I wish to impress upon you two things. The first is that, *whatever the character of professors may be, the excellency of religion is the same.* It might have been more convincingly exhibited to you if they had been exemplary, but its real value is not diminished, even if all of them be hypocrites. It would have made them very different from what they are, if they had fully felt its power; and the reason that they are so far from what it would make them is, not that religion is powerless, but that they either are destitute of it, or possess it only in a small degree. Hypo-

crisy and false profession, therefore, prove to you nothing but that religion is worth counterfeiting. If its real efficacy does not appear in the lives of its professors, you may easily put it to the test by exposing your own heart to its influence. Bring home to your mind, by a system of self-applying consideration, the great truths of Christianity, and see if it will not make *you* a better man than you are; whether it will not humble your pride, control your passions, and elevate your pursuits. If it will not, condemn it; but, if it should do so, you will have a proof of its excellency which the hypocrisy of the whole world cannot destroy.

I may remind you, in the second place, that, *whatever extent of false profession there may be in the world, there is sincerity enough to condemn you.* You certainly speak in your haste, when you say that "*all men are liars.*" Within your knowledge there are some characters effectually transformed, and some persons who, if they are not perfect, are quite consistent enough to evince, both their own sincerity and the value of religion. Look at your father, your mother, your brother, your sister, your friend, your acquaintance; and say whether, with all their imperfections, they do not put you to the blush. The reason that you pay no regard to religion, then, is not that the conduct of its professors does not exemplify its power, but that you turn away from the evidence of it. You *wish* to think it of no value. You are desirous of some pretext to justify your neglect; and you are so anxious to find one, that you seize eagerly on the hollowness of the hypocrite, and the imperfections of the upright, to screen yourself from the light which threatens to convince you. Such is the irrational influence of your hatred of religion. The whole of the case is that you dislike piety; and, if you had not this pretext for your aversion, you would soon invent another. What a criminal and wretched condition! You are then a despiser of heaven's best gift, and a voluntary outcast from its future and everlasting joy! May heavenly mercy pity you! For except you are born again you cannot see the kingdom of God.

LECTURE X.

THE DIRECT MEANS OF CONVERTING SINNERS.

“Of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.”—*Jude*, ver. 22, 23.

DEAR brethren, in setting before you the means to be employed for the conversion of sinners, we have dwelt in the first place upon the force of example; an instrument of great power, and indispensable use. But we must not stop here. Other means are in our possession for the promotion of the same end, and they also should be put into operation. We proceed, therefore, to notice *the direct means of converting sinners*.

I. We shall best advance to the consideration of our subject by making, in the first place, one or two *general observations*.

1. The first is that, whatever methods may be employed for its attainment, *the object contemplated is simple and distinct*. It is to effect, not a change of name or form, of religious profession or external conduct, but a change of character and of heart. No just satisfaction can be derived from anything else, or from anything less; inasmuch as all other changes may take place without in any measure rescuing a sinner, either from the dominion or the condemnation of his sins. We have but one aim, to form a new character, with whatever changes of conduct and profession the production of a new character may induce.

2. Our second observation is that, however the methods to be employed may vary, *their essential character also is simple and uniform*. They are only different ways of presenting divine truth to the understanding, and applying it to the heart. We have nothing to do with worldly methods of attraction on the one hand, or of intimidation on the other; we acknowledge no weapons but those of instruction and persuasion. By any temporal inducement to allure a person to a place of worship, or by fear of temporal injury to keep him there, is to overlook entirely the nature of religion ourselves, and to generate the most mischievous

misapprehensions of it in the minds of others. Efforts of this class, whatever may be their particular aspect or apparent force, have no adaptation to the effect designed ; and a false aim must have been taken before such inapplicable instruments could have been employed. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, nor could such weapons affect the enemies with whom we fight. Nothing but divine truth can reach the heart, and subdue the love of sin ; nor, in the use of any other means, have we either the sanction of God's authority, or the promise of his blessing. For this, however, we have both ; and never shall we be without cause to say, with the apostle, that, though our weapons are not carnal, they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

II. We may now turn to the contemplation of *the various efforts by which instruction may be conveyed.*

The most natural and obvious of these, on the part of private Christians, is conversation ; whether with one person or with several, whether more particular or more general, whether with an avowed design or with a bearing more or less concealed. The same end may be pursued, however, by communications in writing ; a method by which we may seek the benefit of some to whom we have not personal access, and by which we may acquire a more free and confidential intercourse with others. To these may be added an endeavour to induce profitable reading ; either by the dispersion of religious publications, or by placing suitable works under the eye of those whose attention we wish to engage.

As to the method to be employed in any particular case, no specific direction can be given. Cases themselves are of infinite diversity ; and, if they were not, the judgments formed of them would be so. What shall be done as opportunities arise must therefore be left to the determination of individuals ; only let it be determined *by Christian wisdom*, and not by rashness on the one hand, or by mere prudence, or by general example, on the other. Rashness, no doubt, is possible, and should carefully be avoided ; but, in relation to such efforts, the danger of backwardness and inaction is far greater and more common, and requires to be far more keenly and resolutely guarded against. Some warm advocates for caution need to be reminded that prudence is not wisdom, and will not bear to be deified. It is, in many cases,

but another name for shame, timidity, or sloth; and a cloak for the indulgence of these injurious tempers. Zeal, a resolved and courageous zeal, is as essential a part of wisdom as prudence, and constitutes, in fact, the impelling power which prudence is to control; while prudence by itself is rather like a fly-wheel apart from the engine to which it belongs, both useless, ridiculous, and mischievous.

If Christian wisdom be taken for our guide, we shall arrive at three general rules for the improvement of opportunities, at once simple and important.

1. The first is that, *at every opportunity, something should be done*. Our perplexity should not be suffered totally to obstruct our action. This is a case by no means uncommon. If you ask a person why he did not use a specified opportunity for good, he will very probably tell you that he knew he ought to have done something, but he did not know at the moment what to do for the best; and therefore he did nothing, but suffered the precious season to pass away altogether unimproved. This feeling of perplexity may not only become a frequent occasion of neglect, but may at length be regarded as a justification of it; as though one should say, "I did not know what to do, and therefore I thought it *better* to do nothing." This pretext for inaction should be entirely abandoned. It is far better to attempt something, with the utmost wisdom you can command at the moment, than to throw precious opportunities entirely away.

2. The second rule is, that *our efforts should be suited to the character of opportunities themselves, and not to our feelings merely*. Our feelings will be our first and most favoured guides, but they will always be unsafe ones. Suppose, for example, that you have had an opportunity of pious conversation which you did not improve, and you are asked why; your answer perhaps may be, that you could open the subject so much more easily by letter. But did you come to this decision really because the opportunity was not suitable for conversation, or because you had not resolution and fidelity enough to embrace it? Was it truly to do more good to your companion, or to indulge your own timidity and worldly-mindedness? What we deem fit to be done on any occasion should surely correspond with the nature of the occasion itself, and not with a disinclination to improve it. A little honesty in this respect is very necessary, and very reasonable.

With what justice or satisfaction can we be making our intention to do good in one way an apology for the perpetual neglect of it in another?

3. The third rule is, that *every opportunity should be fully, and not partially, improved*. It is not that we should do *something*, but *everything* which can be properly done. If we have an hour which may be spent in profitable converse, we should not content ourselves with making an effort to say two or three useful things, while the rest of the time is consumed on ordinary topics. Every moment of it is valuable, and much too valuable to be wasted. Were there before us fifty grains of gold, should we *then* confine ourselves to the gathering up of two or three, and heedlessly abandon the rest?

III. Allow me to draw your attention, thirdly, to the *manner in which our efforts for the conversion of sinners should be made*. Great importance attaches to this branch of our subject, because upon the manner of our efforts depends almost the whole of our success. He that addresses himself to an ordinary occupation in an unskilful and heedless manner is likely to make no satisfactory progress; still less can we expect a beneficial result from the most vigorous endeavours for the conversion of sinners, if we do not make them with scriptural wisdom and temper.

1. Here it is needful to regard, first, *the aim* of our endeavours.

(1). It should be *direct*: that is to say, we should aim at nothing short of the conversion of those we address. This is, indeed, the whole of our professed design; and to suffer our efforts to fall short of it would seem almost to indicate a forgetfulness of the design itself. Yet this incongruity is often committed. The cases are too numerous in which nothing more is said to ungodly persons than may induce them to keep the Sabbath, and attend a place of worship. Now I am quite aware that, if a person can be brought to a place of worship, he may hereby be brought under the sound of the Gospel, and into the way of instruction. But why should his first kind instructor have stopped here? Had he no more to say? Was he unable, or was he unwilling, himself to publish the glad tidings for the lost? Did he think that they could be effectual only when uttered from the lips of an official minister, or within the walls of a consecrated

edifice? Was he sure, moreover, that his exhortation to public worship would be habitually, or even in a single instance, complied with? Or did he forget, finally, that, before the arrival of the Lord's day, his wretched fellow-sinner might be in eternity, and in hell? Ah, brethren! let every one of your arrows be aimed at the heart; and part with no sinner on the brink of ruin without telling him what, if it should be the last sound of mercy which may ever enter his ears, is sufficient to make him wise unto salvation.

(2). Our aim at the conversion of sinners should be pursued *in conformity with scriptural truth*. We go to them, of course, with the language of exhortation. We have to tell them of something which it is their duty, and their welfare, to be and to do. It is of great importance that this exhortation should be justly and scripturally framed; as it is manifest that the result of our labours must be expected to show an exact correspondence with it. In this respect the Scriptures are in the highest degree intelligible and explicit. "Turn ye at my reproof. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord. Make you a new heart. Wash thine heart from wickedness. Repent ye, and believe the Gospel. Repent and be converted. Be ye reconciled to God. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." In whatever respect the language held to irreligious persons differs from this, or comes short of it, it is plainly unscriptural and wrong. No person, however, can inquire far into the character of the conversation of those who do anything for the conversion of sinners, without perceiving that, in many instances, they painfully depart from the scriptural model. When, pressed with the importance and necessity of religion, a poor creature inquires, What must I do? the answer too often amounts to no more than a direction *to pray*. Now prayer is undoubtedly of the very highest value, and not a word should be suffered in depreciation of it, in its proper place, and for its proper end; but let the question be fairly asked, and scripturally answered, whether prayer is, or can be, or ever was meant to be, the instrument of a sinner's salvation. To this I answer with an unhesitating denial; and I appeal, with the utmost confidence, both to the scriptural doctrine of salvation itself, and to the whole body of scriptural exhortations to the ungodly. In order to

salvation it is necessary that the enemy of God should resign his enmity, and cherish friendship, and that the condemned rebel should submit himself to the righteousness provided for his justification. Whether he does this in the attitude of prayer or not is a mere accident, and altogether unimportant; reconciliation and submission are everything. Without them a sinner is inevitably lost; and these, therefore, in the very first instance should be pressed upon him.

It is marvellous, almost to a miracle, how the tone and import of our addresses to sinners can have so widely deviated, not only from the principles, but from the express practice of the sacred oracles. We find *them* calling upon men to repent (that is to say, to change their hearts, for this is the English of μετανοέω,* the meaning of which is most mischievously disguised by the term *repent*), to be reconciled to God, and to submit to his righteousness; while, though speaking to the same persons, many, both ministers and private Christians, say no such thing, but only call upon men "to read the Scriptures, and attend the house of God, and to pray." The source of this most remarkable difference may be traced, indeed, to the influence of a doctrinal perversion; but not without leaving it equally wonderful that an error should ever have insinuated itself which leads to such a result. It has come to be imagined that men have *no power* to change their hearts, to cherish friendship to God, or to submit to the righteousness of his Son, and that therefore they cannot properly be exhorted to these things; while, being still *able* to read the Bible, to go to a place of worship, and to pray, these form the limits of all reasonable demands. And the principle is undeniably just. If men cannot change their own hearts, it is absurd to call upon them to do so; but then, in what a strange position do these modern discoverers place their Maker, and the old Book which he so long ago directed to be written? *He* bids men change their hearts; and, if these professed friends of his are asked why they do not do the same, they have only to say, in the language of the wicked and slothful servant, which their Master now repels not less indignantly than he did of old, "Lord, I knew thee, that thou wast an austere man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed."

* Μετανοεῖτε, *immutate mentem vestram*. See Schleusner *in loc*.

With such heedless and unscriptural notions, dear brethren, let us have no fellowship. You cannot be wrong while you follow inspired guides; nor, if you depart from them, can you ever be right. You should remember, also, that, in conversing with an irreligious person, you speak in the name and on the behalf of your Maker: a most solemn and even an awful station, in which it is of infinite importance that you should speak the thing that is right. In what measure are you willing to give to a sinner an unfaithful or an inaccurate representation of his Governor and his Judge? What can be more imperative on you than to take his own words, to say nothing to which you cannot add "Thus saith the Lord," and to withhold no part of the whole counsel of God?

To do less than this is, in truth, to do melancholy mischief. You tell a sinner to read, to pray, and to go to chapel. Giving him no further view of his duty, you authorize him to imagine that this is the whole of it; or perhaps you tell him that nothing more is in his power, and that this is the reason you do not address to him any further exhortations. As he supposes you to have a good understanding of these things, he takes this to be even truer than his Bible, and the more readily because he finds it more welcome; now and then he reads a little; in a formal or ignorant way he prays, perhaps, a great deal; he shows himself at the chapel; and remains just as wicked or as worldly as he was before—only with this additional comfort, that he has now done all his duty (what, indeed, can he do more?) and must wait till the Lord pleases to have mercy upon him, for if he is not converted it is not his own fault. This is the actual state in which our population may be found by hundreds and by thousands; a state, not of natural but of artificial ignorance, since it falsifies and puts to silence the very conscience of man; and a state of ignorance and mischief the more deeply to be deplored, because it has been produced by a perversion of the truth which should have enlightened them, and a waste of zeal which might have saved them. Religious instruction, which should have become to the wanderers, like the pillar of fire to the Israelites, a luminous guide through the desert, has thus been made to exhibit the darkened aspect of the ancient symbol, by which the more wretched people are at once confounded and destroyed. It would have been better that they had been left in total darkness, than that so much pains had been taken to inculcate a

sentiment, the prevalence of which presents at this moment one of the very chief obstructions to the awakening of salutary concern. Let it be your endeavour, dear brethren, not to aggravate this evil, but to labour for its cure.

Having set before a sinner the nature and scope of his duty, it is but reasonable that you should point out to him the means of performing it. When you impress it upon him that it is needful his whole spirit should be changed, explain to him likewise how the heart is made to answer to the labour which is bestowed upon it. Encouragingly assure him (and you may easily substantiate it by facts with which he is familiar) that meditation upon divine truths will effectually transform his feelings and his character. Do your utmost to lead him to his chamber with a pledge of fixed and earnest attention every day to the things of God. You will probably find it difficult to prevail in such a request, for such exercises are associated with too many painful concomitants not to be unwelcome; but on this account you should press it the more. In the order of means, it is everything to your success. Never was consideration divided from conversion.

Should you, as you very probably may, be met by the allegation of difficulties in the sacred Scriptures, or by objections of any other kind, whether you feel that you could or could not remove them to your own satisfaction, the better way, as a general rule, is not to make the attempt; but, ascertaining the principles which the objector really holds, to bind him to the just influence of these. The introduction of objections is almost invariably intended for no other purpose than to evade exhortation; and the answering of them, which is generally a fruitless, and almost always an endless, labour, serves to generate rather a spirit of dispute than of seriousness. Nor is it by any means necessary. Every irreligious man, even a deist or an infidel, will be found to hold truth enough to condemn himself: and our method should be to decline all controversy for the time, and, for the sake of argument, to admit every objection; to keep out of view every disputed sentiment; and to press home to the heart and the conscience that which a man acknowledges to be true. You will never find the man of the most meagre creed to be that which his creed is adapted to make him; nor will you ever find so effectual a method of inducing a man to

advance in the way of knowledge, as persuading him to reduce to practice the truths which he already holds.

2. Secondly, *the spirit* of our endeavours should be watched with jealous anxiety. The best efforts made in a bad spirit are likely to be utterly fruitless.

The temper in which we aim at the conversion of sinners should combine three principal features ; fidelity, affection, and importunity.

(1). The most important of all these qualities is *fidelity*. If this be wanting, no good whatever can be expected to result ; as no medicine, with however much assiduity and copiousness it might be administered, could be supposed to effect a cure if it was not adapted to the malady. It is indispensable, therefore, that, in every endeavour to convert a sinner, we should be most explicit as to the nature and amount of man's duty, together with the character and force of his obligations ; as to the extent and heinousness of sin, especially in the love of evil and the enmity to God which prevail in the carnal heart ; and as to the just desert of God's abhorrence and everlasting wrath, together with the utter inadequacy of any efforts of our own to secure, or to facilitate, our acceptance in his sight. These are doubtless unwelcome topics, and may occasion, not only pain, but resentment. It might be much more pleasant to converse at once about the precious blood of Christ and the blessed promises of the Gospel, but it would be far less safe ; for instances have been known to occur, and similar ones are probably not unfrequent, in which addresses of this kind have been made the sanction of delusive hope and fatal consolation.

(2). Fidelity being first in importance, *affection* is undoubtedly second. It would be strangely inconsistent, indeed, if an act of such substantial kindness as the saving of a soul from death should be effected in a harsh and uncharitable spirit. And more especially is the appearance of such a temper to be guarded against, in a case which involves the necessity of making painful disclosures, and adducing heavy accusations. When we tell a man what the Scripture declares him to be, we inevitably run the risk of setting all his feelings of pride and self-complacency in arms against us, and so of closing up every avenue by which our further communications might find access to the heart ; and, if there

is any method by which so undesirable a result may be avoided, it is pre-eminently by kindness of manner, by letting it be seen that we are grieved to convey censure, that we carry it no further than is absolutely necessary, and that our design in it is not to wound the feelings, but to save the soul. A strong inducement to the cultivation of a tender spirit in efforts for conversion, may be derived from the fact that men universally are much more easily influenced by kind methods, than by austere ones.

There is a *false tenderness*, however, against which we must be upon our guard. Like many other good names, that of gentleness has been used as a cloak for far less excellent things. You should hurt no person's feelings *unnecessarily*; but, if it is necessary to their good, it is no real kindness to spare them. Were a surgeon to inflict a wound upon his patient without cause, it would be justly called barbarity; but, if the same, or a deeper wound, be needful to preserve life, the infliction of it is the most substantial kindness. No regard to the feelings of ungodly persons, therefore, should render us unfaithful. In this respect different cases may be differently treated. "Of some," says the apostle in our text, "have compassion, making a difference; others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire." If we may sometimes prevail to allure by the kindlier topics of the Word of God, at others we must not shun to announce its utmost terrors. There are sinners in whose ears it is imperative to utter the sharpest rebukes, and the most tremendous denunciations, which the sacred oracles contain.

I am well aware that such measures may expose us to the resentment of the ungodly, and to the censure of the pious. Yet, even if a little unnecessary severity were now and then discoverable, one would think it might be easily forgiven. If, in drawing you out of the water or out of the fire, a person were to address you a little too much in the tone of authority to be quite consistent with good manners, or to drag you by your feet, or even by the hair of your head, so as to hurt you considerably, would you think of resenting it as an insult, or of demanding redress for it as an injury? Besides, when ungodly persons complain of harshness, they commonly mean only that you come too close in your appeals to the conscience, and show yourself too much resolved to disturb their self-destructive peace. When they say, "be

gentle," or "speak comfortably," they mean only, "speak so softly that we need not listen, or that we may speedily forget." To indulge them in this wish is to destroy them. And, however unpleasant it may be to incur their resentment, or to forfeit their confidence, now, it is far better than to expose ourselves to their bitter reproaches at last.

(3). Our addresses to irreligious persons should be characterized also by *solemn importunity*. We should not talk of religion as an ordinary thing, but should endeavour to show by our manner that we feel its value deeply, both for ourselves and for them. Neither should we content ourselves with merely stating the things which relate to their peace in their presence. We should speak, not *before them*, but *to them*; and, having made them understand what it is we wish them to do, we should make them feel also that we *very earnestly* wish them to do it. This will be effected by representing to them the various motives, to repentance with which the Scriptures abound; by pleading with them the justice of God's requirements, the evil and misery of sin, the riches of his mercy, the blood of his Son, the terrors of his wrath, and the near approach of eternity. There is also a persuasiveness and importunity of *manner* which it is of importance to cultivate. You will best perceive its character, perhaps, by calling to mind an occasion on which you have *tried hard* to obtain a request from an earthly friend; just such, only as much more earnest as the object is more important, should be the urgency of your address, when you beseech a sinner to be reconciled to God.

I cannot conclude without a passing remark on the practice of *praying* with persons whose conversion we are endeavouring to promote. Most readily admitting the importance of following our exertions with fervent supplication for the divine blessing, and the eminent adaptation of prayer to the good of those with whom we converse in many cases, there are, nevertheless, instances in which the effect of it is highly prejudicial. The perpetual use of the forms prescribed for the visitation of the sick by the Established Church has generated an extensive and deeply-rooted feeling that there is some benefit, perhaps even a saving benefit, in having a minister, or other pious person, *to pray by you*. Hence you may often perceive that, while searching conversation is unpleasing, the prayer is highly gratifying, like the welcome

opiate which is expected to allay all irritation, and to repress whatever might disturb the last hours of mortality. The very possibility of having our ministrations perverted to such an effect as this is unutterably dreadful. Too many people launch into eternity buoyed up by false hopes, without the melancholy number being thus increased. What we wish is to prevent them from appearing before their Maker with a lie in their right hand, and to induce wakefulness, rather than to cherish slumber. For this purpose the Word of God is our only resource, and our whole aim should be to secure its admission and application to the heart. Where we have reason to suspect that prayer will be abused, it will be better for us, having provided materials for consideration and pressed home divine truth to the conscience, to leave the house without engaging in that exercise; in which case the blessing which we are conscious that our labours need in order to give them success should the more earnestly be sought when we return to our chamber.

Having submitted to you these observations respecting the direct means of converting sinners, I have now to ask you, dear brethren, not so much whether they approve themselves to your understanding, as whether they have found their way to your heart. Are you prepared and resolved to employ them? Or am I merely presenting an instrument to a hand that is unapt and unwilling to use it?

I know that in you, as in myself, *the active and habitual pursuit of such measures as these is resisted by the corruption that remains, even in the renewed heart.* Much is there of timidity, of self-indulgence, of carelessness, and of sloth. But the question is, Do you mean to mortify these feelings, or to pamper them? Are they to be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ? Or are they to resist his dominion, and to enslave and triumph over you? If the former, may God bless you in your deed! But, if the latter, what then is the force of the various motives which, for seven months, I have been employed in presenting to you? Is it nothing? Nothing that sinners perish around you; nothing that you have means to save, and are urged by every consideration of duty and of gratitude, of pity and of joy, to put them into operation? Can all these things have been weighed according to their magnitude, and yet have left you as indolent as ever? Was it needful that I should spend

more time and more urgency in enforcing them, or that I should go in quest of more constraining topics? Or have you turned away from considerations so directly adapted to disturb the sleep which you have loved? Alas, dear brethren! is this to be the issue of all endeavours to arouse you? Then what remains for you but to die; to depart from the field of obligatory labour to the scene of permitted rest? For earth you are not fit, it is manifest; and God only knows whether you are fit for heaven.

Perhaps *you will turn the efficacy of example into a plea for inaction.* It will be sufficient, you imagine, for you to aim at an exemplary life, without making further endeavours for the good of souls. We have said already that the influence of example is great and indispensable. To those who are disposed to act for God it becomes yet more important, inasmuch as it is requisite to give the stamp of sincerity and consistency to their endeavours. But why should you confine yourself to the use of this instrumentality alone? There is as much to impel you to the employment of other means as of this; and is there, in point of fact, any reason why you will not employ them but your disinclination to labour? If a man were drowning, and you had several means of attempting his recovery, you would either use them all at once, or try a second if the first did not succeed. It would be barbarity if you did not. And is the barbarity of neglecting any means of rescuing men from hell to be thought less criminal, or renounced with less horror? You possess a high sense of the value of example, and a willingness to make use of it to the utmost. But, by separating exemplary piety from personal labour, you deprive it of its principal efficacy. Strong as it is alone, it is far stronger in association with other methods of instruction. Its mightiest force is in giving effect to precept and importunity. The division of either from its companion is itself an inconsistency, and cannot but impair the efficacy of both.

You may feel, possibly, that *you do not know how to make these efforts.* You have no command of conversation, you have no sufficient knowledge of the difficulties of theology, you have no skill in methods of persuasion. Melancholy and afflictive acknowledgment! You are, then, a lamp without a light to shine, you are salt without a savour to diffuse, you

are leaven without energy to pervade the lump. It ought to break your very heart that these things should be said of you. You do not know how to persuade sinners to be reconciled to God? Then you should learn. Did you ever try to learn it? And how can you expect to acquire this heavenly art without learning? None of the ordinary arts, by which are acquired the livelihood of some and the wealth of others, were attained without effort; yet which of us has taken as much pains to know how to persuade men, as we have to learn the methods of manufacture or of business? It is high time that such injurious and criminal ignorance should come to an end. The work of conversion, which is instrumentally intrusted to our care, is far too important for its obstruction on such an account to be looked upon with complacency; and, with the Scriptures in our hands, and the experience of religion in our hearts, it need be a very little while ere so grievous an evil is removed.

To those of you who are disposed to employ yourselves for God and for the souls of men, I have only to say, The Lord inspire you with habitual resolution, and give you large success! Take him with you to your work. When it is done lay it all at his feet. Mortify every feeling that interferes with its entire consecration to his glory. Cover it with exercises of humiliation and of prayer. And be not weary in well doing, for in due time you shall reap, if you faint not.

LECTURE XI.

THE CONNEXION BETWEEN PRAYER, LABOUR, AND SUCCESS.

“Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.”—*Psalm xc. 17.*

You can seldom press with any considerable force the obligation and importance of endeavours for the conversion of sinners, without inducing a reference to the probability, or, perhaps, the improbability, of success. I fear this topic is sometimes intended to aid the evasion of an exhortation or

an argument, by turning the conversation into a new direction, or, perhaps yet more effectually, by leading into perplexities amidst which the heart and conscience may escape from an unwelcome appeal. Upon other occasions it is doubtless adverted to in a better spirit, by persons who, without seeking an excuse or pretext for sloth, are anxious for just encouragement in their labour. In reference to both these cases the subject has considerable importance; and we proceed accordingly to consider *the connexion between prayer, labour, and success.*

I. In the first place, we notice the connexion, with respect to the conversion of sinners, *between success and labour.*

Such a connexion we hold to exist. Labour for the conversion of sinners will be successful. But, before I proceed to the proofs by which this position may be established, it may be well to anticipate an objection which may otherwise immediately present itself to your minds, and weigh unduly against what may be advanced. It is alleged that *all efforts for conversion are not successful, but that in many cases, so far as we can judge, they appear to be fruitless.* Now, to a certain extent, this is an obvious and unquestionable fact; but how little force it has against the sentiment we have expressed may appear from two or three considerations.

First, we are far from asserting the success of *merely apparent efforts for conversion.* Some of them will not bear examination, without showing at once that they have no real adaptation to the end. To take one instance as a sample of many. A person who imagines he is seeking the conversion of his neighbour exhorts him to keep the Sabbath, to attend a place of worship, and, perhaps, to pray; in all which there is no direct adaptation to his conversion at all. Yet he innocently wonders that he has had no success! It would have been much greater matter of astonishment *if he had* been successful. The cases in which conversion can reasonably be expected are clearly those, and none but those, in which the divine truths fitted to enlighten the eyes and to convert the heart are duly employed for the purpose.

Secondly, we are equally far from maintaining *the present and evident success even of well-adapted efforts.* We may conclude that we are unsuccessful at a period much too early for the formation of an accurate judgment. The persons who have baffled our endeavours hitherto may be overcome

by future exertions ; the efforts which we regard with disappointment now may have been preparing for a result which is soon to recompense our toil ; the fruits which we are not permitted to gather yet may be produced in future years ; while, doubtless, at the great day of God, which will be a period for the revelation of many secrets, innumerable instances of successful endeavour will appear of which nothing may be known in this world, either to ourselves or to others. To begin complaining now, therefore, is to begin much too soon ; it is to cry out of a failing harvest almost as soon as the seed is cast into the field ; and to utter lamentations which not only may be groundless, but may be hereafter exchanged for unmeasurable joy.

Thirdly, we are far, likewise, from affirming *that efforts for conversion will have universal and uniform success*. It is rather one of the cases in which the result, though generally satisfactory, admits of irregularities and exceptions. So it is in the productions of the vegetable world. It is not every grain of corn which vegetates ; the productiveness of different seasons is far from being uniform ; there have been years of famine, as well as years of plenty : but did these occurrences ever invalidate the general connexion between the toil of the husbandman and his recompense ? Every year there has been a harvest as well as a seed-time, and still is it an unquestionable principle that he who sows shall reap. This analogy the Scriptures frequently employ to represent the measure of success which may be anticipated in labours for God. The occasional occurrence of fruitless exertion entirely accords with the general principle ; and it will be found to bear no other proportion to the general and ordinary success, than the perished seeds, the blasted ears, and the defective crops, bear to the produce of agricultural labour.

I. Now that a general connexion between labour and success does exist in reference to the conversion of sinners, may appear *from the very facts which have been appealed to*. If in some instances exertion has been unsuccessful, it has been successful in many more ; and it has been successful generally in proportion to the extent and adaptation of the measures employed. The want of success, far from being universal, has not even been prevalent and ordinary. It stands, not as the rule, but as the exception ; an exception for which, as in the case of the ministry of our Lord, a reason

may sometimes be assigned, but which, when no such reason can be given, does nothing to disprove, but everything to establish, the rule itself. If a connexion between labour for conversion and success in it does not exist, it is most marvellous how the one should so generally have attended the other.

2. This point may be argued, secondly, *from the general connexion between means and ends* which is actually established in the worlds of nature and of providence. While God works all things by his all-pervading and mysterious power, yet it is *by means* that he accomplishes the whole process of his administration; and, so far as his operation can be traced, the use of the means is always found to be connected with the attainment of the end. We have never the end produced without the means, nor the means employed without the end. No person can doubt this for a moment, who opens his eyes to the changes of day and night, of summer and winter, of seed-time and harvest, with a thousand others which are continually going on around him. Now the conversion of sinners is an end to be accomplished by means; and, if in all other cases there is a connexion between means and ends, it is natural and obvious to conclude that the same connexion exists in this. If it be not so, then this particular case stands out from all other parts of the divine administration, in isolated and unaccountable peculiarity. It is a single and incredible departure from a principle otherwise running through the whole of God's government. Why should we any more suppose that divine truth should come into the world and not dissipate moral darkness, than that the sun should rise and not kindle the light of day?

3. That the connexion between means and ends, and therefore the certainty of general success, which characterizes all other parts of the divine administration pertains equally to the object before us, may appear *from a consideration of the case itself*. The connexion between means and ends is not arbitrary; it rests upon the adaptation and the sufficiency of the means employed. In the ordinary course of God's ways, ends are never brought about by ill-adapted or insufficient means. Now, the divinely-appointed and only authorized method of aiming at the conversion of a sinner, is to engage his consideration to the Word of God. We ask,

therefore, Are the means adapted to the end? The conversion of a sinner is a matter of persuasion, the Word of God presents motives; the exhibition of these motives to a sinner in a way of serious instruction and exhortation is fitted to engage his consideration of them: hence, therefore, the means of conversion *are adapted* to the end. Are they also sufficient for the end? Do the motives derivable from the Word of God to induce the conversion of a sinner afford good and proper reasons why he should turn to God? Are they fitted to meet and to overcome his enmity to his Maker, and the influence of worldly things? Upon this point the Scriptures bear a decisive testimony. The Psalmist represents the statutes of the Lord as "enlightening the eyes and converting the soul," and an apostle adds his declaration, that the Holy Scriptures "are able to make us wise unto salvation." Nor can any man who considers the immense force and variety of the motives which are brought to bear on the conscience and the heart of a sinner hesitate for a moment on this question. Here, then, are means adapted and sufficient to the end; the means and the end, therefore, are united in the ordinary way: the same connexion exists as in other cases; and, doubtless, the same general success will attend the employment of them.

4. Our argument may be strengthened by referring to the fact, *that the conversion of sinners is placed among the objects of human activity and pursuit.* Every man is to say to his neighbour, Know the Lord, and to turn him from the error of his way. Now the establishment of a connexion between the means and the end is the very basis which God has laid for the whole system of mortal industry, and is absolutely necessary, not only to the compensation, but to the reasonableness, of human labour. Were there no such connexion, a man could never tell what effects might arise from his operations. Wishing to attain one result, he might be surprised, or perhaps injured, by the unexpected occurrence of another; till, baffled and confounded by the confusion which everywhere surrounded him, he would have nothing to do but to lie down in utter hopelessness. We know, however, that this is not the case. The connexion between means and ends is as firm as the foundation of the earth itself; so that generally every man knows what to expect, and no man hesitates to calculate on general results. If the conversion of a sinner is in like

manner connected with the means to be employed for it, then there is the same ground for activity laid as in other instances ; but, if otherwise, then is this object of pursuit involved in those inextricable perplexities of which we have spoken. It is inconceivable that this should be the case. An object the attainment of which was not connected with the only means to be employed in its pursuit, would surely have been withdrawn from the sphere of human labour ; nor would the wise and beneficent Creator have made it obligatory upon man to waste his strength in operations which had no rational foundation, or prospect of reward. Least of all can it be supposed that the case selected for this extraordinary experiment would have been the most important and interesting to which human efforts could be directed. The conversion of a sinner is of incomparable value ; the efforts it requires, the anxiety it generates, the hopes it awakens, are all of corresponding intensity : and, if ever there was an instance in which a just basis should have been laid for exertion, or a well-founded expectation held out for success, it is pre-eminently this. Yet this is the case, and this alone, in which it is imagined that such arrangements are denied.

5. To these topics must be added *the promise of the Spirit*. We are not unaware that the means to be employed for the conversion of a sinner are resisted by the enmity of his heart ; we have not forgotten the humbling discovery that they will be effectually resisted, until the Spirit be poured out from on high ; neither are we unprepared to welcome the blessed consolation which meets us here. But we wish that a right and scriptural view of the Spirit's influence should be entertained. He is not, we conceive, to be regarded as intervening between the means and the end, as though without his influence the end would not be produced by the means when brought into bearing ; but as controlling the subject on which the means are bearing, so that they may bear duly upon it. A wicked man turns away from the truth : hence the influence of the Spirit is needed, not to give the truth power over his heart, for it has had no access, but to bring the heart under the bearing of the truth, or to induce consideration of it. It is as though, with a hammer very fit to break a stone, there was something about the stone itself which made it perpetually slip aside, so that the weight of the hammer could not be brought to bear on it : in such

a case help would be needful ; but precisely, and only, to fix the stone while the blow was struck. Or take the instance of the seed which fell by the wayside. It represents the hearer whose inattention divides the seed from the soil, and so prevents its germination : the work of the Spirit is accordingly necessary ; but wherein does it lie ? Not in augmenting the power of the seed, or of the soil, but in bringing the seed into contact with the soil, or in removing the inattention by which the contact and the subsequent growth have been prevented. The necessity of the Spirit's influence, therefore, detracts nothing from the certain connexion between means and ends. To convert a sinner you are to engage him to the consideration of divine truth : without this you have no hope, and with this you need have no fear. But you find sinners inconsiderate and inattentive. They will not hearken ; they forget your counsel, and even resent your interference. Here, then, receive the gracious consolation which is provided for you. While you strive to engage attention, the blessed Spirit of God will *command* it. You are not sent alone to the work, nor without an almighty and all-sufficient helper. He comes for the honour of the Lord Jesus, whom it is his office and his delight to glorify ; and, though there is a mysterious and untraceable sovereignty in his work, like the wind which bloweth where it listeth, yet in instances enough will he secure the success of your labours to maintain the great principles of the divine administration, to rejoice your heart, and recompense your toil.

6. We may here advert to the *importance which attaches to the conversion of a sinner in the estimation of the Most High*. It is a portion of his works in which we can least of all anticipate a deviation from the general, and otherwise uniform, wisdom and excellency of his ways. Every part of his administration involves the glory of his name, but pre-eminently so the instrumentality which he has put into action for the conversion of sinners. Much as it would be to his dishonour if the ordinances of heaven should fail, or the summer cease to perfect the fruits of the earth, it would be much more deeply so if his word should return unto him void, and not accomplish the thing to which he had appointed it. He has fixed the means by which it is his pleasure that sinners shall be converted ; we cannot doubt, therefore, whether the means shall be successful. Sooner shall the

heavens depart, and the foundations of the earth be shaken, than his Gospel fail of its everlasting triumphs. Nothing shall be suffered to hinder the successes which are so intimately connected with the glory of his name, the recompense of his Son, and the blessedness of his eternal kingdom.

7. The subject before us has been supposed to be embarrassed by *the doctrine of predestination*. When maintaining that augmented efforts for God will be attended with larger success, one is liable to be asked whether any more persons will be saved than have been elected. Supposing, for the sake of argument merely, that such an event should arise, I confess it would not be to me the heavy calamity which some people seem to perceive in it. But the question may surely be represented as a heedless, if not an ignorant, one. It proceeds on the idea that God foreordains ends without foreseeing, or estimating, means: just as though he might have blindly predestinated a great many persons to be converted in a time when few or no means would be used for the purpose; or, with a still greater oversight of the work of his own hands, have ordained that very few should be converted when the means employed would be ample and laborious. The decrees of God are not blind and arbitrary, but wise. They constitute a plan for his own proceedings, formed upon an entire foreknowledge, both of what evil will spring from the heart of man, and of what good he will implant there; a plan formed, likewise, in full accordance with all the great principles of wisdom, righteousness, and mercy, by which his conduct is essentially regulated. It is one of his decrees that well-adapted labour should be linked with success; and hence, with a foresight of periods of activity, he has allotted successful results. If you suppose a diversity in the one, you immediately change the ground and the reason of the other. Upon this principle no difficulty exists in saying that, if other measures had been adopted, other results would have ensued. At whatever period labours for God had abounded, generally speaking, conversions would have abounded also. If more efforts had been made more souls would have been saved. Our divine Lord found no difficulty in speaking on this principle, when, upbraiding the cities in which his chief miracles had been wrought, he said, "If the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in

sackcloth and ashes, and would have remained until this day."

That cannot be a scriptural view of divine predestination which supersedes the fundamental principles of divine government, nor can any representation of it be admitted for a moment which denies or controverts the fact that success is generally proportionate to labour. It is remarkable, indeed, that no attempt has been made to produce this absurd and impossible opposition in any case but in religion. No man ever imagines that, because God has predestinated the quality of the harvest, it will be exactly such whether any seed is sown or not; yet I should like to know whether the quality of the harvest is not as truly a matter of predestination as the number of sinners who shall be converted. Persons who argue so strangely from election as to the conversion of sinners, seem to think that this is singled out from all the other works of God, and made more and otherwise a subject of predestination than the rest. Such an idea is not only incapable of proof, but is directly contrary to Scripture, to fact, and to common sense. Under the pretext of exalting God's sovereignty in his works of grace, it excludes this attribute from his works of nature and providence. The system of divine predestination is one and uniform, comprehending *all* that God does, and equally affecting all—as much the drops of morning dew as the souls which shall be gathered to the Saviour. We demand, therefore, one of two things: either let it be shown that divine predestination does operate differently in the works of nature and the works of grace, or else in both let it operate alike upon us. When any man in his senses will say, There will be as much corn in my field this year whether I cultivate it or not, we will give him credit for consistency and sincerity in saying, There will be as many sinners converted whether I labour for it or not. Till then the common sense of the natural man turns into foolishness the imagined wisdom of the mistaken doctrinalist.

Our conclusion is, that *a connexion does subsist between labour for the conversion of sinners and success*. We are amply confirmed in it by express declaration of Holy Writ. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless return again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. Be not weary in well doing; for in due time ye

shall reap, if ye faint not. Wherefore be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." If you labour wisely for souls, you shall not labour in vain. You may have to wait long for your success, and still longer for the knowledge of it; but it shall be given you. You shall turn sinners unto God, and save souls from death; and the more according to the devotedness with which you strive for it. Some of you have said that you would labour if you had but encouragement. Here, then, is the encouragement you seek; *now let us see that you commence the labour.* It will be put to the proof now whether there is anything in the conversion of a sinner which you think worth attaining, or whether the imagination that you would labour if you had encouragement has been a mere pretext for your inaction. Either be up and doing, or else acknowledge from henceforth that you really do not value the rescue of a soul from hell sufficiently to impel you to any just effort for its accomplishment.

Some of you, perhaps, have considered the success of the endeavours we are enforcing as a matter so perplexed or uncertain that you have felt yourself protected, if not justified, in supineness. Let me now ask you, *whether there is so much perplexity and uncertainty about this question* as you have been accustomed to imagine. Is there enough to ward off the force of all exhortations, to remove the bearing of all obligations, to vindicate the sin of cherished sloth, and to embolden you before the face of your Lord, when, as an unfaithful steward of his manifold grace, you shall be accused unto him of having wasted his goods?

II. We notice, secondly, the connexion *between successful labour and prayer.*

I wish you to observe that I speak of no connexion *simply between prayer and success.* It might have been imagined that no person would ever have been so absurd as to dream of success without labour; yet so it is that, for the conversion of sinners, people often imagine they have nothing to do but to pray. Prayer is thus separated from labour, and in this attitude it can never be linked with success. The thing is impossible, and the very idea is absurd. We can never convert sinners by prayer only. It has no adaptation whatever to that end, but solely to engage the blessing

of almighty God *upon means employed*. If no means are employed, prayer can lead to no result ; and, if we are not doing whatever may be in our power to put the means into operation, our prayers can be little more than hypocrisy in ourselves, and a mockery and a nuisance to our Maker.

There is, however, an especial connexion *between prayer and successful labour*: that is to say, our labour is much more likely to be successful when it is accompanied with prayer.

1. *The state of mind of which prayer is an index and expression is one on which God may be expected especially to smile*. It carries with it an acknowledgment of our own insufficiency, and of the necessity of his gracious interposition. It is an attitude of self-renunciation and of dedication to his glory. It is a pledge of scrupulous conformity to his will, and of fidelity to his interest. It is the attitude which is most becoming in us, and most honourable to him ; and upon which, therefore, he can look with the most entire complacency. It is but too certain that efforts for the conversion of sinners may be made in a different spirit. How perpetually, in truth, do we find the very contrary of all this rising within us, and giving to our endeavours a character which, if we ourselves disapprove it, a holy God must abhor. It cannot be too solemnly remembered, not only that he is holy, but that he is jealous for his holiness. "Them that honour me," he hath said, "I will honour: but I will not give my glory to another." Hence, therefore, it may be expected that a larger measure of his blessing will descend upon endeavours the spirit of which he can most fully approve ; and that the indulgence on our part of a self-sufficient, self-seeking, or any other unhallowed temper, will operate to the diminution, and perhaps to the prevention, of our success.

2. Prayer has a further adaptation to secure and augment our success *by directly engaging the interposition of that almighty arm on which success depends*. It is an exercise by which we invoke the presence and operation of God himself. It is an endeavour to bring him down to the work in which we are employed, and to secure the bearing of his power on the object we wish to effect. If such a result as this may be hoped for, it is manifestly most important and cheering ; then indeed may we go forth with a well-grounded expectation of triumph. And may it not be hoped for? The Holy Scrip-

tures abound with declarations that the Lord heareth and answereth prayer. "He hath never said, Seek ye me in vain. We know that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." And nothing can be more eminently accordant with his will than the conversion of sinners; a work to which his express command hath summoned us, to which all our obligations have impelled us, to which all his promises have encouraged us, by which his Son is to be honoured, his purposes fulfilled, his kingdom established, and heaven filled with everlasting praise. Prayers for such an object are like sweet perfume above, and cannot but be returned in blessings on this guilty world, and on the efforts we are making to turn sinners unto God. His own arm is already engaged in its accomplishment, and his amplest energies are yet to be thrown into it. Having summoned us to act as his instruments, he is well prepared to infuse into our exertions his living and all-conquering power. In this work prayer links and identifies us with our Maker, and binds to us in every step of our progress that Mighty One before whom every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess.

To those of us who are using any endeavours for the conversion of sinners, and really longing for success, *the lessons* we are thus taught are of the highest value.

1. *Every exertion should be made as upon our knees.* When contemplated in prospect, it should be laid before God with submissive but fervent supplication for his blessing; as the words of instruction pass from our lips, petitions for the same blessing should breathe silently from our hearts; and when the effort is past, it should be presented before him for whose glory we have made it, with renewed entreaty that he will give it effect. This prayerful spirit should be sedulously cultivated. Every departure from it, every deficiency in it, should be closely watched and carefully remedied; unless, at least, we are willing that our labour should be in vain. This, however, is not all. *Everything pertaining to our temper and motives should be scrutinized with great vigilance.* We may lose the conversion of a sinner because we seek it for our own gratification, or for the increase of a particular church, more than for the glory of God; or by any one of a thousand other evils which are of perpetual occurrence within us. With how much assiduity should we pursue the destruction of these evils! What a bounty is

attached to the mortification of them! How much, not of our happiness merely, but of our usefulness, depends upon the advancement of our sanctification! What a grievous character it gives to our corruptions, and even to our infirmities, that they may become the barriers to our success when we strive for the conversion of sinners; and so displease our Father which is in heaven that, for our discipline, he must withhold his blessing! Alas! that the unmortified corruptions of the saints should thus become the baue of sinners, and the curse of the world!

2. We may hence learn *the probable cause and design of our real failures*. We have wondered perhaps at our want of success. But let us scrutinize the character of our exertions, and it may be we shall find a cause. In what spirit were they made? With as much seriousness as eternity should have inspired; with as much promptness as our obligation should have awakened; with as much prayer as our weakness should have induced? Ah! when we look into these things, how much iniquity mingles with our most devoted labours! Far from being surprised that we have had so little success, we ought to be astonished rather that we have had so much. With so many things to provoke the displeasure of a holy God, we have cause for adoration and gratitude that he has rendered any labours of ours conducive to the advancement of his kingdom. What effect has our want of success produced upon us? Has it merely led us to complain and to despond; to imagine our exertions useless, and to think of laying them aside? It *should* have produced a very different effect. It should have sent us to the examination of our hearts, to the detection and mortification of our corruptions. This is the very discipline by which our heavenly Father would make us more holy, that we may become more useful; and, if we are not watchful and active to secure this result, we shall lose some of the greatest benefits which the dispensations of God towards us are adapted to convey.

3. It may now be seen *where the blame lies for the present state of the world, and of our own neighbourhood*. It is a striking fact, and has often been considered too awful to be inquired into, that, at the distance of eighteen hundred years from the commission to evangelize all nations, the world should be as it now is. Nor is it less strange that in this town there should have been so many pious people and

enlightened ministers for so long a time, and yet nine persons out of every ten should be still in their sins. It has been sometimes thought that the reason of this has been the sovereign pleasure of God, that his purposes obstructed more rapid progress, and that the time for wider successes was not come. This has been supposed to be an awful mystery; and, if it were true, it would indeed be so. But, if the views we have taken be correct, it is altogether false. The world is not converted, not because it has been God's pleasure to withhold his blessing from labour, but because it has been his people's pleasure to be idle. If it be the general principle of his government to proportion success to toil, then to say that the time is not come is not an evasion merely, but an untruth. God's time for giving success to labour is always. It was in ages past, and it is now. Where is the man whose experience contradicts the assertion? Let us bring this matter, therefore, home to ourselves. *We* are the cause of the world's ungodliness, and every one of us is the cause of so much of it as we have had means of correcting, and have not employed them. If it should seem hard to lay so heavy a load of blame upon pious people, and above all upon ourselves, I only bring to your remembrance with how much complacency that heavy load has for ages been laid by many upon our Maker! Do we mean to clear ourselves of this guilt? Is our brother's blood still to lie at our door, or to stain our hands at the judgment of the great day?

4. Finally, our subject affords *the amplest encouragement to devoted labourers, though of the humblest class*. Some of you may be ready to say, I am no scholar, I have no gift of utterance, I have no talent; what can result from such exertions as mine? Much, if God will bless them; nay, more than you can ask or think. And what is it that God may be most certainly expected to bless? The addresses of the talented and the eloquent, of the powerful and the popular? By no means. He honours those who honour him. The feeblest, the meanest, the unlikeliest effort, made in a spirit of genuine consecration and earnest prayer, will be more effectual than the most imposing exertions without it. This you can pre-eminently cherish. It matters not that you stammer, or that you tremble; that you are afflicted by your conscious unskilfulness, or almost overwhelmed by a sense of your unworthiness; if the Lord is with you, you are

mighty. While you mistrust yourself, see that you do not mistrust him; but labour incessantly, and, as you labour, pray—"Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

LECTURE XII.

EFFORTS FOR THE CONVERSION OF SINNERS CONNECTED WITH THE BLESSEDNESS OF HEAVEN.

"Behold I, and the children which God hath given me."—*Hebrews* ii. 13.

IN commending efforts for the conversion of sinners to your serious and diligent regard, I have already shown them, dear brethren, to be linked with everything that is influential and touching upon earth; but I cannot take leave of the subject which has so long occupied us without tracing their relation to another world, and *their connexion with the blessedness of heaven*. Thither we hope we are going, and everything ought to be interesting to us which is found among the elements of our future and eternal joy. Has our hope of heaven a sufficiently substantial character to warrant the appeal which is now to be made to it? Do we think that we are really going there? Is it a place of conscious and of strong attraction to us? Are we looking to it with vivid anticipation, and actively treasuring up materials for its ineffable joys?

Though the passage before us has no actual reference to the subject we have announced, it may without impropriety be applied to it, and be considered as the language of one who has been happily instrumental in turning sinners unto God, when appearing with them before the presence of his glory. "Behold me, and the children whom thou hast given me."

I. It may be expected, perhaps, that, in the first place, we should advert to the *general principles* on which this representation rests. They are simply these: that in the world to come there will be a recollection of present transactions, and a recognition of the persons with whom we are now associated; and that such recognition and recollection will

give rise to appropriate and characteristic emotions. Respecting some of these topics questions have been raised, and doubts have been suggested, into which it is impossible here fully to enter; I must, therefore, satisfy myself with stating that my own conviction on the subject is decided, and with glancing at the general grounds on which it rests.

1. Of the *recollection of present transactions* I do not know that a doubt has ever been entertained, by those, at least, who anticipate a day of general judgment. Without a remembrance of the transactions of our own life, and the scenes and circumstances in which they have taken place, it is impossible that any effective process of inquiry and retribution should be instituted; since there could be no acknowledgment on our part of the justice of the sentence which might be passed, nor even a perception of the conduct to which it applied. The very notion of a future judgment is founded upon the recollection of present things; and hence, accordingly, we are led to expect, not merely a remembrance in fact, but a remembrance of extraordinary comprehension and vividness. Our iniquities will be set in order before our eyes, and every secret thing will be brought to light; innumerable occurrences will be recollected which are now forgotten, and life in all its details will stand in complete review.

2. The *recognition of persons* in a future world is naturally blended with the recollection of events. The admission of it has been supposed to be embarrassed by a question relating to the manner in which recognition may be effected, a point most certainly not unattended with difficulty; but it is far from being the only difficulty connected with the mysterious aspect of futurity, and may easily be left among the many problems which eternal wisdom will solve with infinite facility hereafter. As to the fact, it does not seem possible to separate the recognition of persons from the remembrance of actions. The recognition of those with whom the various paths of good or ill may have been trodden, will be as necessary to a retributive judgment as the recollection of events themselves. Association is too intimately combined with the formation of character to be excluded from its recompense. To annihilate personal recognition would be to place every man at the day of judgment in a world of strangers, to divide every man from his species, to destroy the moral ties which have bound men together in relations of righteousness and sin, and to blot out

no inconsiderable number of lines which have been expressly written for the imperishable records of eternity.

3. As little doubt can be entertained, I conceive, respecting the *emotions which recollection and recognition will inspire*. If the contemplation of objects awakens pleasure or pain respectively at present, upon what supposition can it fail to do so hereafter? We have no intimation of a change in the rational nature of man. There is no declaration of such a stupefaction of our sensibilities, or such an absorption of them in some other object, that we shall look upon earthly remembrances with vacancy or with indifference. The transactions of this world, indeed, with the character which they have first expressed and ultimately formed, will constitute the main topics of interest to us in a future state, and the immediate springs of our sorrows or our joys. It is this which makes our condition hereafter to correspond with our present character. Far from less powerful emotions in the world to come, we are on every account to look for an immeasurable increase in their force and vividness; inasmuch as the objects by which they are excited will appear in vaster magnitude, and inasmuch, also, as we ourselves, free from the incumbrance of the flesh, shall be possessed of more intense sensibility.

I am not unaware that the sentiment thus generally expressed connects itself with the possibility of sorrowful reflections in the minds of the blest. But heaven, it is objected, is represented to be, and doubtless is, a place of *perfect* happiness. It might be sufficient to make us suspect the sense we attach to this language, to find that we are understanding it in such a way as to supersede so obvious and almost unquestionable a principle as that above stated. If there is no method of maintaining our idea of the perfection of future happiness, but by maintaining also that we shall be able to look upon the events and results of the present life without the emotions they are adapted to excite, scarcely a doubt can exist but our notion of future happiness is unscriptural and false. We affirm generally, that happiness is not essentially—that is, not in all circumstances—identical with freedom from sorrow. There is not only a “joy of grief,” but there are cases in which grief itself is necessary to happiness, and could not be banished without essentially marring our happiness by its absence. Take, for example, the grief which arises from an instance of ungrateful or ungenerous conduct towards

some faithful friend. When does this cease? With reconciliation? Far from it. Should we be more happy if it were to cease? No. We should rather abhor ourselves if it were ever to be banished from our breasts. And, if sorrow be not inconsistent with happiness, it is not incompatible with heaven. I cannot hesitate to express my belief that sorrow of this kind enters largely into the feelings of the redeemed in glory. When so deeply as when we shall see him as he is, shall we mourn that we pierced the Lord? And, if on this subject there may be sorrow, why not upon every other which, under all the circumstances then existing, may be adapted to excite it? The declaration that in heaven there shall be "no more sorrow," and all similar passages, seem to be justly applicable only to external sources of affliction. In addition to this, we know that there is to be no more sin, nor any interruption to the enjoyment of God. There will, therefore, be no unhappiness in heaven; but it is to me inconceivable how its happiness should ever be exclusive of sorrow. Who that has been unfaithful to his dying Lord would wish to cease to mourn? Who above all would do so, when surrounded with the brightest manifestations of his glory, and the most touching expressions of his love?

It would occupy far too much time to refer you to the various portions of Holy Writ by which the general views I have now submitted to you might be illustrated. You will scarcely fail to call to mind the description of the general judgment in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, where our Lord speaks of being fed when he was hungry, and clothed when he was naked; and declares to the righteous and the wicked respectively, "Inasmuch as ye did it [or did it not] to one of the least of *these my brethren*, ye did it [or did it not] unto me." I shall content myself, however, with adducing the language of the apostle Paul to the Thessalonian converts, which, on the subject more especially before us, is specific and decisive. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?* For ye are our glory and joy."

II. We proceed, in the second place, to the *particular application* of these general principles which our immediate subject involves. Efforts for the conversion of sinners, we have said, are connected with the blessedness of heaven. We do not, of course, intend to intimate that future happi-

ness will be principally derived from this source, or to overlook the grand aspects of the celestial glory; but, in conjunction with them, and subordinately to them, we conceive that pleasures of no inconsiderable amount will arise from the efforts for the conversion of sinners which may have been made below.

1. They will be a source of joy *if unsuccessful*: a case which I introduce, not because I think that such efforts will in any material degree be unsuccessful, but to meet the apprehension that they are, and the possibility that they may be, so.

For in this case they will afford matter of *grateful reflection*. No subject can be matter of more direct or influential reflection in a future world, than the manner in which we have acquitted ourselves in this towards the great and glorious Being in whose presence we shall be dwelling. And, if it will be the occasion of a generous grief that we ever were his enemies, and that, after we were reconciled, we were such unfaithful friends, it surely cannot fail to afford cause of grateful reflection that we were in some measure enabled to cultivate a worthier spirit. If the review of some aspects and portions of our conduct will be associated with the conviction that they were characterized by a sinful disregard of the calls and motives to duty, it must be a matter of proportionate pleasure to look upon some exertions which have about them a character of fidelity, and bear testimony to a heart sincerely devoted to the Saviour's glory. A prominent place in such reflections will be held by efforts for the conversion of sinners, a mode of exertion peculiarly a test and exemplification of unfeigned and vigorous piety.

They will furnish materials for humble yet *joyful presentation to God*. To him they have been rendered on earth, and to him they will be presented in heaven. The impulse of the same feeling which has actuated us below will constrain us to lay them at his feet, as the discharge of our stewardship, and a contribution to his glory. With deep humiliation, indeed, we may well approach his footstool with services which bear so very small a proportion to our means and our obligations, and which have been in all respects so grievously polluted by sin; but yet, whatever has been done for the Saviour an affectionate heart cannot be content without carrying into his presence; and, if there be anything which

may be laid at his feet, O with what joy will it be deposited there! "Lord, thou gavest unto me five talents; behold, I have used them—alas! not *all*, but part of them for thee."

The delight of presenting our services will be exceeded by that of their *gracious acceptance*. For they will be graciously accepted, through him whose precious blood cleanses alike ourselves and our services from sin. While all unfaithfulness will be forgiven, no measure of fidelity will pass without his express approbation. To whatever extent he can call us "good and faithful servants," he will say, "Well done," and bid us enter into the joy of our Lord. How much toil will one smile of his repay! What an infinite recompense for poor, spiritless, and unstable exertions like ours, will be constituted by his approval; "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!"

What is the reason that representations like these fall on our hearts powerless, and without application? Why do we seem as though this language never could be addressed to ourselves, and as though we must pass into heaven some other way? It is because we are not conscious of doing anything for God; because we feel that his claims upon our service are not brought home to our hearts, and carried practically into our lives; because we know there is nothing for which the heart-searching God can say, "Well done," and no ground for his denominating us "good and faithful." But, if we banish these truths from our memory, we do not blot them from the Bible. Do we forget that there are only two classes of servants, the "good and faithful" on the one hand, the "wicked and slothful" on the other? And is it the latter of these that we are willing to resemble in his character and his doom?

2. But I design more particularly to dwell on the blessedness arising in the heavenly world from *successful efforts* for the conversion of sinners; a topic on which there is the fullest encouragement to dwell, because we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord.

Imagine yourself, then, dear friend and fellow-labourer for God, imagine yourself in the world of glory, among "the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven." Think that you behold them in all the beauty of perfected holiness, in all the blessedness of celestial joy. As the ransomed of the Lord they have

returned, and are come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy, and sorrow and sighing have fled away: for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne is feeding them, and God has wiped away all tears from their eyes. Imagine that you see them: but whom do you see? Your parents, I hope, and your children, your near and remote relations, your friends and your acquaintance, without any reason to look round with disappointment, and inquire wherefore any of them is wanting. But suppose that, in surveying these, your eye alights upon some over whom your heart has yearned, and upon whom your labour has been bestowed; some whom you have been the means of guiding to the Saviour, and of rescuing from the wrath to come. How thrilling is the anticipation! Let us dwell for a moment on the delights which will thus be opened to you.

You will rejoice in their happiness, especially as you contrast it with their former wretchedness and woe. Once you saw them polluted and debased by sin, now you behold them renewed in the image of God. Once you saw them engaged in desperate hostility against their Maker, now in the spirit of ardent and devoted friendship. Once under the sentence of wrath, now accepted before the throne. Once banished from God, now in the presence of his glory. Once on the brink of hell, now amidst the blessedness of heaven. Strange contrast! Wonderful transformation! And who has accomplished it? Doubtless, the power of almighty grace, but it is linked also with your instrumentality. Yours is not the blood which has redeemed them, nor the might which has subdued them; but yours *are* the lips which instructed them, and the reproofs which prevailed with them. With what amazement will you behold the result of your endeavours! You did not think the salvation of their souls a trifle, indeed, when you attempted to promote it; you knew the result would be glorious if you should be successful, but you anticipated nothing like *this*. O! to think that you have been the means of rescuing a soul from the anguish of the ever-burning lake, the smoke of whose torment you may discern, perhaps not dimly, arising up for ever and ever; that anything you have done has tended to produce a character so beautiful, to lead to a condition so blessed, and to people a realm so glorious!

To the sight of their happiness will be added *the reception*

of their gratitude. First of all, indeed, they have prostrated themselves before the God of all grace, who has chosen them as the monuments of his mercy, redeemed them by the blood of his Son, sanctified them by the power of his Spirit, and appointed you as the means by which his purpose of love should be executed. But the happiness they enjoy is too closely linked with your instrumentality not to attach to you a lively interest, and to kindle a fervent gratitude. Perhaps your children will again cling to your breast, and, with looks of ineffable love, remind you how they drew their early knowledge of the Saviour from your lips. Perhaps your parents will, with overflowing joy, salute you as their parent in the Lord. Perhaps a brother, a sister, or a friend, shall bless you for the affectionate importunity employed for their good. Perhaps the victims of ignorance and vice whom you gathered for instruction from the highway of sin, or perhaps the tenants of those abodes of poverty and wretchedness into which you carried the glad tidings of salvation, will press in concert around you, to pour their blessings on your head, and to greet you with innumerable thanksgivings for the unwearied patience with which, amidst a thousand discouragements, you pursued their everlasting welfare.

Further, *you will behold in a new and most interesting light the fruits which may have resulted from your labours.* The progressive and ultimate influence of the instructions upon which, when they were given, there rested either the darkness of obscurity or the cloud of disappointment, will then be made apparent to you. And, though it may not, perhaps, be allowable to anticipate that success will be discovered in every instance, yet little doubt can exist of its being much more extensive than it now appears. You may find that efforts which you made in weakness were turned into strength; that language dropped in discouragement nevertheless found its way to the heart; that reproofs often repeated in vain at length fixed upon the conscience; that persons whom you regarded with despair have been brought by your words to meet you in glory; and that, in those who were removed from your instructions before any fruit appeared, the seed at length sprang up, and has borne fruit unto eternal life. You may find that in some cases good has been done by you when you little thought of it, and scarcely intended it; that some of the very slightest and most acci-

dental expressions have been greatly blessed; or that where you most feared disappointment the happiest results have been secured. Nor is this all. The wider relations and subsequent bearings of your endeavours will at that period be manifest to you. *Now* you are aiming at the conversion of individuals, and by the number of individuals converted you estimate your success. But, when the events of all ages are presented to you, and you are permitted to trace the influence of every one upon those which succeeded it, you will see how the conversion of one has been in effect the conversion of others, perhaps in the same generation, perhaps in the next; while the number of sinners turned to God in consequence of the original effort may have multiplied in every age, even to the end of the world. Upon what an interesting eminence will you stand! What a magnificent survey will be open before you! not merely of the works and ways of God, all of which are eternally to be admired, but more especially of that condescending grace which has, in so delightful a measure, made *you* the author of good, and permitted you to diffuse such valuable benefits. How will heartfelt gratitude be awakened, and rapturous joy, and unbelief and despondency be put to everlasting shame, while you clasp to your breast the children whom God hath given you as the glad recompense of your spiritual travail, and an ample reward for your most anxious toil; and adore the grace which has made exertions so few and so feeble the means of such ever-blessed results!

These may be called the *selfish* pleasures of the future day, but there will be some *generous* ones of still deeper intensity. Here, if we are Christians indeed, our hearts are identified with the glory of God and the honour of our Redeemer; much more so will they be when we arrive at the better world, and every remnant of carnality shall be destroyed. If now, therefore, it is among our chief pleasures to render any contribution to our Saviour's glory, it will yield far higher delight when we shall realize the production of this result in his eternal kingdom. O! when you shall see how bright that glory shines which he derives from the triumphs of his grace, how sweet the pleasures are which he draws from the presence of the ransomed ones, how ecstatic will be the thought that you have had any share in their conversion! What shall you feel when you may say, "I have contributed

to the formation of my Redeemer's crown, and have poured some drops into the cup of his richest joy. The unutterable glory of this blessed place I have been enabled, through grace, in some humble measure to prepare for him who loved me, and gave himself for me."

What, in fine, will be your delight, when you shall present this contribution to his glory before your Saviour's face! What an annihilating, yet elevating, attitude! How will you acknowledge the unspeakable privilege of having been permitted so to labour! How will you adore the condescending mercy which accepted and has owned your instrumentality! How will you shrink into nothing before him who has given the increase to your toil, and make the courts of the eternal King re-echo with his praise! "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy sake!"

To this it must be added, that the honour which you have been permitted to render to your Lord will, in milder and heart-rejoicing rays, be reflected on yourself. He cannot but approve, and his approbation will be your glory. Irradiated by his smile, you will have place among those who, having "turned many to righteousness, will shine as the sun for ever and ever."

I am not aware that, in the representations I have now made, I have departed from the words of soberness and truth, though I have certainly fallen immeasurably short of the realities towards which I have endeavoured to lead you. Have I at all succeeded in carrying your convictions and feelings with me? Is there anything fallacious in the principles on which we set out, or in the manner in which we have applied them? And, if there is not, will you not endeavour to realize the subject, and bring it home to your hearts? You say that you hope to go to heaven, and to spend eternity amidst the pleasures which are at God's right hand. Now these which I have described are some of them. Do they really engage your earnest desire? Are they not worth possessing, and worth some trouble to secure? Will they not be an addition of unspeakable value to the blessedness of a better world?

To many of you I am persuaded that I need not make any further appeal. But some, perhaps, may be ready to say, "If ever I do get to heaven I shall be happy enough. All are perfectly happy there." Now I would be at the utmost dis-

tance from depreciating the blessedness which every redeemed sinner will enjoy in the realms above. The lowest place in heaven must be one of inestimable privilege and unutterable bliss. But our representation is that there are joys above the common level; that, in addition to the felicity of a ransomed enemy, there is that of a devoted friend. If we have cause to be grateful for the former, there is every reason why we should also covet the latter. It is pre-eminently adapted to the gratification of a renewed mind, it appeals powerfully to every principle of piety, and is peculiarly expressive of the riches and condescension of our Father's grace. Why do we spurn what he thus presents to us? Why does that possess no attractions for us which possesses attractions for every pious heart? Is your heart, then, destitute of piety? Are the principles not within you to which the ever-blessed God has directed his appeals? Are you yet experimentally ignorant of "the hope of his calling, and the riches of the glory of his inheritance for the saints"? If you condemn the higher portions of celestial felicity, can you really have a taste for the inferior? Are you not looking at heaven in a light altogether erroneous, as a place of happiness apart from character? And does not your distaste for any of its pleasures give you just cause for suspicion and alarm? Is it not an indication of prevailing carnality which ought to engage your immediate regard?

To those of you, dear brethren, who do feel that the pleasures now set before you are worthy of being coveted and secured, I must most solemnly say, *remember how they are to be attained*. None of the joys of heaven are to be attained by slumber. We must be wakeful and active in spiritual things to make our way thither at all. But the joys we have now in view are not to be secured even by the closest walk with God, and the most sedulous cultivation of personal piety. It needs the resolved and persevering use of direct effort for the conversion of sinners. It needs that the heart should bleed for them, and the lips plead with them. It needs that time should be improved and opportunities embraced. It needs that sloth, and ease, and timidity, should be shaken off, and labour, difficulty, and resistance vigorously encountered. If, therefore, there is in the celestial joys we have been contemplating anything worth possessing, stir up yourselves to immediate activity. This is the only place and

the only time in which sinners can be converted to God. Lose the opportunities of to-day, and perhaps you lose all the opportunities you may ever have of promoting the object. The sinners upon whom your eye now rests, or who may now be within the sphere of your easy exertion, are the only ones, perhaps, to whom your efforts ever may be directed. Neglect them, and you neglect all. Be up, therefore, and doing. These moments, and opportunities, and means, which you suffer to lie by you, or to glide away, unimproved, are the very things which you must bring into use; and these friends and relations whom you fear to address, these ignorant and vicious neighbours whom you regard with despair, are the very persons for whom you must employ them, if you mean to attain the joy set before you. *Do you mean to attain it?* Or are your emotions respecting it to be as transient and inoperative as others have often been?

Let us learn, dear brethren, to attach a different value to our means and opportunities of usefulness. We think them few and small; too few and too small to be worth any diligent or laborious improvement. We regard those to whom we might speak as either too ignorant and vicious, too young and trifling, too old and obstinate, or too proud and haughty, to be hopefully addressed. And yet these discouraging characters, these few opportunities, by only a little diligence may be converted into elements of celestial joy. There is not one of them out of whom, or out of which, we may not extract delights for heaven and for eternity. If unsuccessful, our labour shall have its reward; and, if successful, a recompense still more ample. O! why do we not more correctly estimate our treasure? Why does a grievous bondage to sensible objects, and a remaining carnality of mind, induce us to squander such multitudes of means and opportunities, more precious than jewels and than gold?

But suppose we do neglect them, and pass through the world, with whatever attention to our own salvation, little concerned, or, at all events, little active, for the salvation of others. This may be a method of great quietness and ease; it may withhold the heart from many a pang of commiseration, and the tongue from many an effort of instruction; it may be deemed a matter of privilege and luxury now, but what will it be at last? What will it be when, undeserving as we are, through the rich mercy of Him whom we have

served so unfaithfully, we shall be admitted to the realms of glory, and shall see the fruits of more devoted labour? While some discover in the ransomed throng sinners converted by their instrumentality to augment their joy, and cover them with blessings, none shall pour benedictions upon us. The survey of the unrevealed history of providence will yield no traces of spiritual and eternal benefits diffused by our instrumentality. And, while others shall appear before God with the children he hath given them, we shall stand in distinguished solitude, separated alike from labour upon earth and from some of the richest joys of heaven. We shall have made no exertions upon which God may cast a smile of approving love; we shall have no success for which to prostrate ourselves in adoring gratitude; we shall have contributed nothing to the glories of his kingdom, or the brightness of his crown. We shall not be able to regard our capabilities as having been devoted even to unsuccessful labour; but shall have to remember that we loved our own ease better than the glory of our Lord, and could not resolve upon the toil of being faithful in his service. What melancholy reflections will these be for the world of glory, a world in which we are expecting to be perfectly and for ever happy! I know that all our iniquities will be forgiven, and that all bitterness of wrath will be banished from the regions of the justified; but the griefs of friendship in the review of its infidelity are not to be despised, nor the affliction of having lost opportunities of happiness never to be regained. Rich may be the pleasure of praising the love which forgives our treachery; but sweeter far will be the grace which accepts and crowns a laborious fidelity of friendship. O may this blessedness be ours!

Those of you who are labouring for souls should carefully bear in mind the relation of your present labours to your future joys. They will not seem heavy when you compare temporal things with eternal. Taking our views from earth, we shall greatly deceive ourselves respecting the magnitude of our object, and the value of the results; it is only from heaven that the light can be derived in which these things can be truly beheld. Set always before you, therefore, the glory that is at hand. Place every effort at the feet of your Lord, as though you were already in his presence. Let every convert whom he allows you to behold mingle in your

imagination with the spirits of just men made perfect; and cherish an habitual anticipation of the period when you may present them all before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, saying, Behold me, and the children whom thou hast given me!

Our subject bears with no inconsiderable power on those to whose conversion our efforts are directed. We wish, dear friends, to turn you to God, and guide you to glory. Our persuasions have undeniable justice and urgency in them when we plead with you for your own welfare, but we may address to you now a motive of a different and more generous kind. We ourselves have an interest in the result. To see you in heaven will afford us an unmeasurable joy, and enrich beyond expression the felicity which we trust is prepared for us there. Shall we have joy over you in the Lord? Will you permit us to be so recompensed for our toil? Does the labour we bestow upon you deserve a recompense? It is in your power to make us an invaluable remuneration; not, indeed, with money, for we seek not yours, but *you*. It is in your happiness that we shall be happy. Only flee from the wrath to come; only turn from the lying vanities which seduce you; only set your faces Zionward, and let us meet you in the presence of the Lord, and this is all we desire. Shall we desire it in vain? Is it a recompense for our toil which you can find it in your hearts to refuse? Never shall we cease to covet it, so long as life and hope remain; but, should you deny us this felicity, you will not deprive us of the whole of our reward, for we shall be unto God a sweet savour of Christ, both in them that are saved and in them that perish.

THE ACTIVE CHRISTIAN:

OR

INDIVIDUAL EFFORT

FOR THE

CONVERSION OF SINNERS DIRECTED,

IN A

SERIES OF LECTURES.

PREFACE.

THE present volume is to be considered as a sequel to the one entitled "Individual Effort for the Conversion of Sinners enforced, in a Series of Lectures adapted to promote a Revival of Religion." The former was designed to *awaken* activity, the present is intended to *direct* it. Assuming that the reader is in fact a Christian, and that he is determined to be an active one, it is the sole aim of this book to assist in the accomplishment of this resolution, by entering experimentally into the difficulties by which it is obstructed, and suggesting some practical directions by which it may be promoted.

I have not written on this subject because I think that Christians universally, or even generally, are making individual efforts for the conversion of sinners; on the contrary, it seems to me that no duty is regarded by professors at large with greater indifference, if I might not say aversion: but because the assistance I have endeavoured to render is due to those who are thus employed, whether their number be greater or less. Some such undoubtedly there are, and perhaps not a few, though scattered but too thinly over the wide surface of the church, and the wider surface of the world. Under God, they are the chief glory of the former, and of the latter the principal hope. It is in them that Christianity attains its most consistent exemplification, and by them that it exerts its most powerful influence; and, if the world is to be converted, or the church to be enlarged, I believe it will be eminently by their instrumentality. Happy and inestimable band! How does my heart wish that your number may speedily increase, and that one who looks on you with an almost unutterable complacency may truly belong to your hallowed fellowship!

It is to such Christians that the following discourses are

presented, with a confidence that they will not be uninteresting, and a hope that they will not be unprofitable. They have probably felt the need of some practical help, in a work at once so important and so difficult as that of turning sinners to God; and I doubt not they will accept kindly the counsels of one who is a fellow-labourer, as well as a friend. Whatever herein accords with the wisdom of God may he graciously bless to their benefit!

If it is painful to the author to feel that there are many professors to whom this volume will be of no interest, it is not for his own sake, but for theirs; and he begs to ask them whether it ought not likewise to be painful to themselves. What do they mean by a continued neglect of duty which is not of ignorance, for they know that individual efforts for the conversion of sinners are both obligatory and important; but which is either of inconsiderate levity or cherished self-indulgence, perpetuated year after year while a perishing world appeals in vain to the one, and the love of Christ to the other?

READING, *Jan.* 20, 1832.

LECTURE I.

SURVEYING THE FIELD OF LABOUR.

“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”—*Acts ix. 6.*

HAVING already delivered to you, dear brethren, a series of discourses adapted to induce and to urge you to individual efforts for the conversion of sinners, I now proceed to some topics of instruction and of counsel connected with such endeavours. I am to take it for granted, therefore, that you acknowledge their obligation, that you feel their importance, and that you mean to make them. May I safely take this for granted? Does every one of you who has a knowledge of salvation for himself really purpose, and already begin, to say to his neighbour, Know thou the Lord? Have the arguments which have been presented to you been seriously weighed, and practically applied? Or have they been resisted, evaded, or forgotten? Upon some of you I trust they have not been without a beneficial and abiding influence: would to God that influence had been universal, and more deep, both upon others' hearts and upon my own!

If, however, you are doing something, and intending to do all that may be your duty in this respect, accept kindly at my hands a few counsels adapted to guide and facilitate your efforts. They are submitted to you by one who knows something of the difficulty both of commencing and sustaining them, and may not improbably meet your experience in a work which you likewise may have found not unembarrassed.

I present to you on this occasion the ACTIVE CHRISTIAN, for such you are resolved to be, *surveying the field of labour*. Having heard the voice of his Lord calling him to exertion, he adopts the inquiry, Lord, *what wilt thou have me to do?* Such should be your immediate attitude and primary exercise. Summoned to labour, you should attentively and carefully survey the field which is to be cultivated by your toil. Per-

mit me to suggest to you, in the first place, *some general reasons why such a survey should be made*; and in the second, *the particular points to which it should be directed*.

I. In speaking of *the general reasons why a deliberate survey of our field of labour should be made*, I might insist on its obvious propriety and necessity. Without considering what we have to do it is not likely we shall do what we ought, and it is certain we shall do nothing wisely or well. A heedless activity is an evil scarcely inferior to absolute sloth; since it affords little prospect of a beneficial result, and, together with a waste of strength, incurs no small hazard of actual mischief. These general observations apply to nothing more forcibly than to endeavours for the conversion of sinners. In no respect may we more easily, on the one hand, go out of our place, and make attempts where we ought not; or fail, on the other, to fill it up with completeness, and to be active always when we ought; in no case, therefore, is it more necessary to look well before us and around us.

Not to insist further, however, upon a topic which is too obvious to require extended notice, I may proceed to point out some of the *specific advantages* which an attentive survey of our sphere of action will afford.

1. *It will give a definite and practical character to our general sense of obligation.* We hope that we have already a general sense of this obligation; but, while it remains general, it will be in a great measure vague and uninfluential. We know that we ought to try to convert sinners; but, unless we inquire also *what sinners* it is our duty to persuade, there is little probability of our ever beginning the work. A merely general conviction of this duty may render us uneasy, and perhaps almost unhappy, by generating a consciousness of unfulfilled obligation, but it can scarcely lead to action; it is much more likely gradually to subside, and finally to disappear, if it is not even intentionally banished as an unwelcome and disagreeable guest. It is of great importance, therefore, that our general conviction of duty should be connected with a specific view of the persons to whom it relates; and that we should be able to say, *It is my duty to labour for the conversion, not merely of some persons, but of those particular persons whom I now contemplate.* Our duty then will assume a more definite and tangible form; it

will be easier to begin, and more consciously criminal to delay.

This advantage will be attained by the attentive survey which I am recommending to you; and it can be secured by no other means. Deliberately examine what apparently irreligious persons are properly within the reach of your influence, and then apply to them the general sense of obligation which already exists within you. Say to yourself, These are the sinners whom it must be my endeavour to turn unto God; and here I must begin my efforts to instruct, to convince, and to persuade. The various pretexts which may have hindered your activity will thus be deprived of one of their principal shelters, and you will be able at length both to detect and to exterminate them; while you will no longer be appalled by the apparent but unreal vastness, or perplexed by the seeming inaccessibility, of an undefined and intangible undertaking. You will not be looking on an unmeasured wilderness, with the thought that some unknown portion of it is to be cultivated by your labour; but there will be before you a plot staked out and appropriated, inviting and enforcing the immediate commencement of your toil.

2. The survey recommended to you *will yield important information, and rectify many mistakes.* Strange as it may seem, it is true, that, as men in general know little of their own hearts, so they know little likewise of their opportunities of usefulness. While they are altogether insensible to the obligation of useful exertion, it is not wonderful that opportunities should be disregarded; but, even when this insensibility is removed, they are by no means speedily or extensively seen. The eye of the mind, like that of the body, is apt to dwell upon things that are remote rather than things that are near; and the immediate openings for useful exertion are thus in a great measure overlooked, even by those who wish to improve them. Hence the feeling so common among well-disposed persons, that there is little or nothing for them to do. If they were such or such an one, then they should have some valuable opportunities of action; or, if they were in some office, they should have scope for exertion; but in a private and obscure station like theirs such things cannot be expected. Another sentiment equally erroneous and mischievous is connected with this; a sentiment, namely, of satisfaction and complacency

that persons who have done nothing have nevertheless done all they can: with our small opportunities, it is asked, what can we do more?

A survey of our position will speedily supply a remedy for these common and hurtful errors. Let any Christian but seriously commence the inquiry how many ungodly persons are within the reach of means of religious benefit which he may use, beginning with his family and his neighbourhood, and extending his eye through the wider circles of his acquaintance and casual intercourse, and he will find them unexpectedly numerous. Several, perhaps, may be found within his own house; many within a few yards of it; and multitudes more crowding every path which he treads. Such a scrutiny will call up innumerable objects of this class as out of non-existence, it will place the inquirer as in a new world, and for ever banish the delusion that opportunities of usefulness for him are either wanting, or few.

Connected with the notion that we have few *opportunities*, is the kindred fallacy that we possess few *means* of usefulness. When urged to exertion, persons not unfrequently say, But I am not fit for what you would have me do; I have not a capacity for such efforts; I must leave them to others. I shall notice this subject more particularly afterwards; but I may just observe here, that an attentive survey of our position will go far towards the formation of a more accurate estimate. While we have no realizing view of the existing ignorance and irreligion which surround us, we may imagine that we have no means of attempting their cure; but, when these are before us in some tangible shape, no man who has found the adaptation of the Gospel to his own necessities can fail to perceive its adaptation to those of others. Whether he may be disposed to act is another question; but assuredly he will be constrained to acknowledge, These people want instructions, warnings, reproofs, and encouragements, with which I am acquainted, and which I might administer.

3. An attentive survey of our sphere of action *will supply us with many valuable impulses to labour*. In the course of such an exercise we shall see ignorance and sin in their substantial forms of criminality and wretchedness; the levity which trifles with eternity, and dances on the brink of everlasting ruin; the obduracy which dares the divine anger, and defies the most solemn reproof; the galled conscience

and the dissatisfied heart with which worldly objects are pursued; and the gloomy, though resisted, anticipations of death and a future world. These are things which, if we know the value of our own souls, we shall not contemplate unmoved. While we are musing the fire will burn; a fire of compassion for perishing immortals, and of zeal for our dishonoured Maker, which will consume the lingering love of quietness and ease which to the last impedes our exertions, and will impel us to some practical, if not to commensurate, activity. It was intended that our hearts should be thus affected. As the sight of distress is among the most prompt and powerful of the stimulants designed to awaken the benevolence by which it is to be relieved, so it will be with compassion for souls; and, if there is anything valuable in the influence of this feeling, it behoves us to arouse and cherish it, by an intent and realizing observation of the guilt and wretchedness of those for whose good we are to labour.

II. To these general observations on the importance of taking a survey of your field of labour, let me now add some remarks on *the points to which your attention should be chiefly directed*.

1. Your first object should be to observe *its extent*; or to ascertain what persons are so situated with respect to you, as to be within the sphere of your proper influence for their spiritual good.

This is manifestly a question upon the decision of which much depends, and in the consideration of which much wisdom is required. The space we mark out for ourselves may be either too large, or too small. I am very far from wishing it to be too large. I have no inclination to say, Be sure you take an ample scope. On the contrary, I should prefer that the boundaries of your allotment should be traced in a spirit of moderation, and that the determination of every point should be effected by the truest wisdom. No man is likely to do much good out of his place; and a small field well cultivated is better than a large one half neglected. At the same time, I suppose no person would intentionally assign himself a sphere too small, or entertain a wish to exclude from his regard any of the objects to which it is justly due. A determined dishonesty and cherished sloth would be manifested in such a case as this, which I know not how to ascribe to any Christian indeed.

(1). What, then, is *the principle* upon which we are to proceed? How shall we mark out the persons for whose conversion we are bound to labour?

In answer to this question, I shall not begin with the undoubted claim of persons nearly related to us, and so go on to more remote and questionable obligations, but say at once that *our duty is equal to our opportunity*, and that we are bound to labour for the conversion of every sinner for whose conversion we have an opportunity of labouring.

I know that this general principle will assign a large sphere to every Christian. It may be asked with surprise and incredulity, "Am I really *bound* to instruct, and persuade, and try to save, *every* person for whom, if I were disposed, I *might* make such efforts of kindness? I might make such endeavours, certainly, in many cases; but is it to be said I *must*? May I not also leave them alone, or make them where I choose?"

Far be it from me to put even the best of principles to an unreasonable stretch, or to introduce any principle which is not of unquestionable rectitude. I beg it may be considered, however, whether the rule I have laid down, that obligation is commensurate with opportunity, does not run through the whole of God's requirements, and of our duty. In whatever respect our Maker requires anything of us, he requires all that we have. He has produced nothing for waste; and everything which he bestows upon us, including certainly opportunities of usefulness, he commits to our trust as stewards of his manifold kindness. The wasting of any portion of our Master's goods, though less wicked than the profligate squandering of them all, is nevertheless criminal, and in exact proportion to the quantity fruitlessly consumed.

Or, if we regard the exercise of benevolence towards men, the same rule will be found to obtain. What distressed persons are we bound to relieve? All, certainly, whom we have the opportunity of relieving. If there were a number of persons perishing with hunger, and you possessed both food for their supply and a facility of conveying it to them, how many of them would you deem it your duty to feed? Would you acknowledge an obligation to present bread to half or three-fourths of them, and then say respecting the remainder, I may feed them or not as I please? Would you feel justified in passing any one by, and, when his necessities

were pleaded before you (the opportunity still being in your possession) in saying, "I am not bound to relieve *him*"? If not bound to relieve this sufferer, under what obligation have you been to relieve any, or upon what ground has the selection been made? Illustrations of this kind might be adduced to any extent; but it must be evident, I conceive, that the obligation of benevolent exertion, if it be admitted to have any existence at all, arises out of the opportunity, and of course must be commensurate with it. The rule cannot but apply with equal certainty, and with much greater force, to efforts of spiritual kindness. If he is a hard-hearted person who, with an opportunity of saving any man's life, makes no exertion, yet more hard-hearted is he who, with an opportunity of snatching a sinner as a brand from the burning, does not employ it for his rescue.

If, however, any one objects to the rule that our obligation to make efforts for the conversion of sinners is as extensive as our opportunity of doing so, I only ask for some other principle applicable to the case. For myself, I confess that I know of no other. If we are not bound thus to act whenever we have an opportunity of acting, our own discretion must be called in to select the seasons when we shall be inert. To what extent is this discretion to be carried? If I may choose not to act upon one occasion, so I may likewise upon another, and upon another, until upon every occasion I have exercised that allowable and convenient discretion, and have thus obtained a sanction for not acting at all.

Let it be remembered, therefore, that unless anything remains to be justly objected to it, the co-extensiveness of opportunity and obligation is the rule by which our field of labour is to be determined. Where we have not opportunity, of course we are under no obligation to act: where we have, we have no justification for sloth. Neither youth nor age, nor wealth nor poverty, nor learning nor ignorance, nor vice nor amiableness, nor nearness nor distance, nor any other circumstance, can release us from the obligation of improving whatever opportunities we possess for promoting the spiritual welfare of our kind. In taking a survey of our sphere of action according to this principle, our business is to inquire, Towards what persons have I an opportunity of employing means of religious benefit? All these are comprehended in our field of labour.

(2). The field of labour may be contemplated to some extent in *its details*. Not that it may be possible to describe minutely the sphere actually open to any individual, or that it would be desirable to do so; but the general scope of our duty is readily divisible into smaller departments, of which it may not be unimportant to take a passing notice.

There is, first, *the domestic circle*; which presents the most obvious and most important facilities for the conversion of those who are as yet strangers to God. A pious person cannot be in any station in such a circle without having opportunities, more or less abundant, of promoting their spiritual benefit. Though parents have naturally the amplest influence, that possessed by the younger members of the family is still large, nor is that which pertains to servants by any means inconsiderable.

Next may be mentioned *the neighbourhood*; including those who reside either in immediate contact with us, or within that sphere of kindly intercourse which in many cases is, and in all cases might be, maintained with those around us. It may seem rude, or hazardous, or uncharitable, to interfere with them on matters of religion; nor will I advocate for a moment any measures which may be really improper, or unwise: but I cannot help suggesting the probability that something may be done without any impropriety, and the obligation that everything which can be done short of impropriety ought to be done. A kindly intercourse upon general subjects, perhaps an interchange of offices of kindness, commonly exists in a neighbourhood, and clearly presents an opportunity of conveying religious benefit which ought not to be overlooked. Our reluctance to such efforts may too justly be traced to our slender appreciation of eternal things. If any of our neighbours were in temporal distress, we should inquire after their welfare, and make offers of assistance; and why is it that similar interest is not shown in reference to spiritual and eternal sorrows, but because we do not feel in this respect a proportionate anxiety? For myself, I must avow my conviction that the mere fact of neighbourhood constitutes both an opportunity and an obligation to efforts for conversion. I ought no more to live next door to a man who is going to hell and not try to save his soul, than I ought to see his house on fire and not endeavour to rescue his life.

A third department in the field of pious labour is that of *friendship*, with the wider circle of *general acquaintance*. The opportunity of bringing religious truth under consideration in these circumstances is obvious; and, in the case of intimate friendship, the effort may be seconded by influences of the most favourable and most powerful kind.

Another portion of our sphere of action is opened to us by *religious connexion*. While this associates us with some persons of piety, it brings us into contact with some also of a contrary kind. Very few families, and no congregational bodies, are found altogether devoted to the Lord. To those who are thus brought within our influence we should endeavour to be useful; and the more so, because it is particularly as professors of religion that we are known by them. In every effort of pious labour, therefore, according to our ability, we should take a part, if without obtrusiveness, on the one hand, without backwardness on the other. The Sunday School, the Christian Instruction Society, the Sick Man's Friend, the Village Preaching Association, and whatever else may be in action for the good of souls, should be promptly aided by every one according to his opportunity, for opportunity creates an obligation.

The stranger must likewise be included within our sphere of devout endeavour, so far as he is brought within that of our influence. With almost numberless persons to whom this name may be applied we have an occasional or casual converse, either through calls of business, through intercourse with the world, through applications for charity, or the accidents of relaxation or travelling. Far as I am from urging an indiscreet or invariable introduction of religion, it cannot be denied that casual conversation, if carefully watched, would afford at least *some*, if not *many*, opportunities of useful endeavour. Why may not an effort be made to save the soul of the poor creature who, half-naked or starving, importunes, and perhaps receives, your bounty for his body? Why may we not keep in mind the profit of persons with whom we fall in upon a walk, or are associated in a stage-coach? Why may we not try to substitute for frequent and sometimes long conversations about the weather, or politics, or the passing concerns of the day, something of serious and beneficial bearing? It is unquestionable that many such

things might be done without any breach of Christian wisdom; and if so, then they *ought* to be done.

Finally, *the distance* ought not to be excluded from our regard. We have much intercourse with those who are far removed from us; and the opportunities thus afforded are of no trifling value. Perhaps we have relations hitherto far from God, who, as relations, are easily accessible to our serious counsel; perhaps we maintain a correspondence of friendship with similar persons, any letter to whom may be directed to their spiritual good; and with respect to letters of an ordinary kind, with whatever obvious exceptions, unquestionably many of them might easily and most properly be imbued with profitable sentiment. Now what can be done ought to be done. The opportunity and the obligation are one.

Perhaps, on individual application of these remarks, you will not find your own field of labour partaking of all these departments, or of all of them equally; but the hints I have thrown out may guide your inquiry, and assist you to ascertain what its just limits really are.

2. After the *extent* of your field of labour, your inquiry should be directed to *its condition*. You will thus learn what occasion it presents for your exertion, and of what kind those exertions should be.

Here it will be your main object to ascertain, as nearly as you can, which of the persons within the sphere of your influence are in a state of irreligion; an inquiry of some delicacy, indeed, but of obvious necessity, and of no injuriousness or impropriety. If you are met by the question, How can you judge the heart? your reply may be that you do not judge the heart any further than its quality is manifest in the life. Our Lord has taught us that human character may be known, like a tree, by its fruits; so far, therefore, as these can be observed, a just foundation is laid for an estimate even of the heart itself; where they cannot be observed, you form no estimate at all. If, again, you are asked how you can presume to call others to your bar, you may answer, that you do not call any man to your bar. Your opinion is formed, not for the purposes of judgment, but of mercy; not to pronounce condemnation, but to lead to pardon. It is formed, not to be proclaimed to others, but to be expressed in earnest kindness to themselves. Neither is it for the

most part any such matter of difficulty to form an estimate of character as these questions seem to imply. In a deplorable number of instances the conduct of men puts doubt immediately to flight, and renders it manifest beyond all question that they are without God, and therefore without hope, in the world.

In the estimate we thus form of character, though we should not be harsh, we should above all things be faithful. In this respect there is a wide difference between the manner in which we should *speak* of persons, and that in which we may *think* of them, especially when taking measures for their good. In the former case there is the utmost importance in expressing what is commonly called a charitable judgment, hoping and believing all things; but in the latter, as an opinion erroneously unfavourable can do no injury, so it is far safer than erring on the opposite side. It is much better to be aiming at the conversion of a man who already loves the truth, than to be neglecting one under a mistaken notion of his piety.

In order to an accurate estimate of character, we should beware of laying too great or exclusive a stress upon appearances. We should not regard immorality as the only evidence of irreligion, nor steadiness and the forms of piety as certain tests of godliness. We should not be satisfied respecting the spiritual state of persons merely because they are of unblamable conduct, or regular attendants at a place of worship. Much more than this is necessary to constitute real religion; and it is too certain that, under such fair and pleasing appearances, there may exist a cherished enmity to God and love of the world. Our inquiries should be directed to the detection of these latter evils: a task, if we know our own hearts, of no insuperable difficulty. The word of unerring truth furnishes us with numerous and decisive tests of varied and easy application for the discovery of latent iniquity; while the new creation of divine grace is of a nature too blessed and influential to remain impenetrably concealed.

When the condition of your field of labour is thus scrutinized, you will find it to present a mixed and varied aspect. Some, no doubt, will appear of decided, and perhaps of eminent, piety, but probably the few; while the far greater number must be ranked among the enemies of God and their own souls. The features of irreligion, also, will probably

vary much. Some, perhaps, you will perceive to be grossly vicious and profligate; some in avowed infidelity; some in deep ignorance; some in daring impiety; some consciously hopeless, and some with a false hope; some the victims of delusion, of pride, of formality, of fancied virtue: and, mingled with these it may be, some conscience-stricken, trembling, and unhappy; some anxious and inquiring; some broken-hearted and needing consolation. All these matters it is highly important that you should distinctly and vividly set before yourselves; not rapidly and superficially, as at a glance which leaves no abiding impression, but distinctly and vividly, that you may feel deeply and permanently what you have to do. Much of the impulse and direction of your exertions is to be derived from such a review.

3. To the survey of the general condition of your field of labour should be added a contemplation of *its peculiarities*. For, though there is a general similarity in the circumstances of mankind, yet every man's condition has some peculiar features by which it may be distinguished from that of every other man. It is so with our spheres of usefulness; and much of the completeness and wisdom with which we shall occupy them depends on the correctness with which we estimate their distinctive features, and the carefulness with which we regard them.

Some peculiarities arise from our own condition, and others from that of those by whom we are surrounded. Perhaps we may be so situated as to form a part of no domestic circle; or, if we do, we may occupy the station of a parent, a child, or a servant. In matters of neighbourhood or general intercourse, and in relation to all other methods of usefulness, our efforts may be modified according as we may be of either sex, in youth or in age, in the higher or in the lower walks of life, at our own command or under the authority of others. A regard to these things is highly necessary, in order to know what we may do and what we may not do, and to direct as well as to open our path.

Those among whom we are to employ ourselves, in like manner, may give to our position a characteristic aspect. We may be conversant chiefly among the lower classes, or we may have an extensive access to the higher. We may be in a family where we stand singly amidst ungodly relations, or we may be one of several pious members of a family

trained up for God. We may be in a neighbourhood peculiarly abounding in profanity and vice, or we may dwell where order and decorum are eminently observed. We may encounter resentment and opposition, or we may find a ready and welcome access. Infinitely multiplied as these diversities may be, they are all of them instructive, and they ought to be influential. They require from us a special preparation of mind, and corresponding modes of exertion; and much of our usefulness will depend upon the adaptation in both respects which we can succeed in acquiring to the specific circumstances of the case.

Having thus set before you, dear brethren, the importance of making an attentive survey of your field of labour, and the points to which it should be directed, I now earnestly commend you to the task. Perhaps you have never made such an attempt; or, if you have, you have never carried it to a proper completeness. As now presented to you, perhaps, it appears a great and difficult undertaking, but be assured you will not find it so. I know, indeed, that it will require more than a superficial and momentary attention, and that it cannot be effected amidst the hurry and din of busy life. It will take you to your chamber, but you ought not to be unwilling to go there. If you will be an active Christian, you must be there often and long. Go, then, dear brethren, and spend but one hour in the survey of your field of labour, and all difficulties will vanish before you. Commence your endeavour with an humble and fervent approach to God. Say: "Lord, thou hast bidden me exert myself for the conversion of sinners; I am come to inquire of thee what thou wilt have me to do." Implore the light and guidance of his Spirit, and then enter diligently on your employment. If your thoughts wander, recall them; if your heart slumbers, awaken it; and persevere, till you have looked attentively at your sphere of action, in its extent, its condition, and its peculiarities. And when you have done so, be sure that you remember *what it is* that is before you. It is not a picture to be admired, or a landscape to be gazed upon, but a space of ground to be cultivated. It is not a garden of pleasure, but *a field of labour*, and a field of labour *for you*. Those in your family, in your neighbourhood, in your acquaintance, in your religious connexion, in your casual intercourse, in your distant correspondence, who are yet in the gall of

bitterness and the bond of iniquity, are the persons whom you are called upon to instruct, to warn, and to persuade. I have been addressing you as persons stirred up and resolved in this respect to do your duty; it will now be put to the test whether you are so or not. If your duty should appear more extensive and more onerous than it has ever done, if your feelings should still be but defectively prepared to accord with such large demands upon your activity, do not at once shrink from the prospect and abandon the effort. The same considerations which have awakened you in part, and made you willing to undertake a measure of exertion, are adapted and adequate to overcome your remaining lingerings. Bring your heart nearer to the Saviour, and into fuller contemplation of eternal things. Ask yourself pointedly whether the exertion from which you shrink is more than the ruin of souls demands, or more than the love of Christ deserves; and whether, since he has no motives of greater power to adduce than those which he has presented to you, he must at length look beyond you for more faithful servants, and more devoted friends, ere the labour shall be done.

LECTURE II.

ESTIMATING HIS RESOURCES.

“Bearing precious seed.”—*Psalm cxxvi. 6.*

HAVE you, dear brethren, so far pursued your intention of exemplifying the character set before you, that you have taken a serious and deliberate survey of your appropriate field of labour? Have you carefully inquired what persons are within the legitimate sphere of your exertion for their spiritual good? If you have done so, you have doubtless found their number very considerable, and, perhaps, much larger than you had previously imagined. Instead of being, as you may have fancied, almost shut out from opportunities of usefulness, you have probably found them rise and expand beneath your opening eye, till the voice of him who has summoned you to labour has seemed to say to you, Behold, I have set before you an open door.

You have not, I hope, cherished a spirit of refusal, or of reluctance, to enter upon the labour assigned to you. But, in order to proceed either with wisdom or with success, it is important that you should understand the nature and extent of the means you possess for its prosecution. To have surveyed the field you are to cultivate, and to have ascertained the measure of its barrenness, is one thing; it is another, and to the full as necessary, that you should thoroughly acquaint yourselves with the instruments at your command for the promotion of its fruitfulness. Without such an inquiry, you may remain in a great measure ignorant of your capacities for usefulness, while to a much greater extent you may overlook or underrate them; and thus, like the man who, though he knows he has work to do, either thinks he has no tools, or does not recollect where they are placed, or is imperfectly acquainted with their use, you will be likely to attempt nothing, or to engage yourself in action either with an enfeebling despondency, or with a perplexing sense of insufficiency, or with actual embarrassment and mistake. When you seriously look on the waste submitted to your care, it may, perhaps, seem to you as though you had no sufficient means for converting it into the garden of the Lord; yet you may be assured that, if you are with any propriety called to apply yourself to its culture, the means are at hand. The call to labour would otherwise be absurd, and never could have issued, as we know it has issued, from the wise, the just, and the gracious God. That you may be imperfectly acquainted with them, both as to their true nature and the extent to which you possess them, is highly probable; and hence arises an additional reason for the inquiry I am recommending to you. Take the pains to see whether you are not, in the language of the text, "bearing precious seed," adapted to vegetate in the soil however unpromising, and, under the divine blessing, secure of bringing forth the fruits of piety; and, not to confine ourselves to this expression, but to take the whole range of illustration to which it leads, whether you have not the means of breaking up the fallow ground, and of ploughing in hope that, if your seed should be sown in tears, you shall nevertheless reap in joy.

On another occasion I have stated to you that the methods by which the conversion of sinners may be pursued are either

direct, or indirect. The latter consist in the force of example, while the former comprehend all immediate appeals to the understanding and the heart. I will not here repeat what I have already urged on these topics in two former discourses.* I propose rather to suggest an inquiry in detail, what resources may be possessed by each of us respectively for pursuing these methods of activity with benefit and success. The subjects which will thus present themselves to our regard are *character, knowledge, talent, property, influence, and time.*

1. We observe, in the first place, that *character*—I mean, of course, *pious character*—forms one portion of our resources for the conversion of sinners. I call it so, because the exhibition of it in an exemplary manner is adapted to this end. A deep sense of duty, and a solemn impression of eternity; humility and meekness; love to God, and joy in his salvation; likeness to Christ, and dedication to his glory; all this, exhibited in our conduct, is fitted to instruct, to persuade, and to convert men. It carries to the heart a reproof of iniquity, and a conviction of the excellence of religion, powerfully adapted to the production of good. It is, therefore, an instrument of conversion. It should be the aim of all who possess piety, not merely to cultivate it for their own sake, but to manifest it for the benefit of others; according to those words of our Lord, “Let your light shine before men; and so shine that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

In estimating your resources for the conversion of sinners, then, you should inquire whether, and to what extent, you possess a substantial piety. It is, of course, to be assumed that to some extent you do so; inasmuch as your desire to become an active Christian implies that you are previously a Christian indeed. Now, even if your attainments in religion should be small, as perhaps they are, you should remember that the possession of the least portion of it yourself confers upon you a capacity for inducing it in others. Whatever you have of real religion, be it ever so little, so much you have of means for the conversion of sinners.

This observation obviously acquires greater force in proportion to the strength and eminence of piety. If, by a

* Pp. 254 and 268 of this Volume.

deep work of grace, by a long experience, by a near walk with God, by abundant privileges, by numerous trials, or by any other means, our character have been matured and our graces rendered strong, our example is, in these respects, so much the more fitted to instruct and attract the ungodly; and whatever we may have attained of Christian lowliness, or spirituality, or joy, or submissiveness, these treasures fit us to enrich others while they actually enrich ourselves. They augment our resources for the conversion of sinners. Let us, therefore, faithfully ask ourselves, not for the purposes of pride or self-gratulation, but for the sake of justly estimating our means of usefulness, what the state of our character is; and whatever we may find reason to acknowledge, with adoring gratitude, that God has wrought in us, let us charge ourselves to remember that it is all to be employed for him.

It is the more needful to impress ourselves deeply with this obligation, because it is with peculiar facility kept out of sight. To be Christians, and to cultivate sedulously the graces of the Spirit, we may readily acknowledge to be our duty, but there it might naturally seem that our duty, in this respect, has its termination; more especially with regard to those more experimental and more mellow exercises of joy, or of patience, the great end of which we may conceive to be the comfort of our own souls. Such an idea, though not unnatural, is decidedly wrong. These things fit us likewise for a beneficial exemplification of religion in the eyes of the ungodly, and should sacredly be regarded as enlarging our means for their conversion.

2. Secondly, *knowledge* constitutes another portion of our resources for the conversion of sinners; knowledge, that is to say, of divine truth and the way of salvation. This is the direct means of conversion in every case, and is the very element with which it is above all things important to imbue the minds of those who remain yet unconverted. Whatever is known, therefore, on this subject is directly fitted, by its communication, to accomplish the object in view.

It behoves us to ask ourselves, consequently, whether we have any knowledge of divine things; if we have, it confers upon us a proportionate capacity for the turning of sinners unto God. Now, when persons are pressed to communicate religious knowledge, it is common to hear them say, "I am

no scholar," or, "I have no learning;" and this seems to be intended as an excuse for their neglect. Whether such a representation be more or less true, it obviously cannot answer the purpose for which it is adduced. The question is not whether you have any *learning*, but whether you have any *knowledge*: any knowledge of God, or of your duty to him; of your own transgressions against your Maker, and your inward corruption in his sight; of your soul's value and danger, and the method of escape from the wrath to come. If you have not a knowledge of these things, how are you a Christian? And, if you have, why can you not impart it? What foreign language does it require that you should learn? What science is it needful you should attain? The truth is that you possess that which alone is necessary, and is above all things calculated, to fit you for the very effort from which you shrink, namely, an experimental acquaintance with Christ. Of what service would the classics or philosophy be to you in this respect, if you had not this? And, since you have, in what manner does the want of them obstruct your saying, Behold the way to God? Knowing what is adapted to your own salvation, you know also what is adapted to the salvation of others; and, if you be the most ignorant of Christians, you have knowledge enough for the conversion of the world.

It is obvious to observe here, that our resources for the conversion of sinners are augmented in exact proportion as our knowledge is increased. Some Christians have acquired an enlarged experience; some possess a more extended acquaintance with the Word of God; some have familiarized themselves with the controversies which relate to the doctrines or to the evidences of Christianity. Now, in whatever direction, and to whatever extent, our knowledge may be enlarged, the whole of it is to be ranked among our means of doing spiritual good. It should not be confined to our own breasts, whatever may be the satisfaction or the benefit we may derive from it; but, like a light in darkness, it should be made subservient to the advantage of others as well as to our own. We can scarcely fail to be thrown among persons to whom the knowledge we possess may be suitable and important, and, in all methods, it should be our aim to be communicating it. In a contrary course we shall resemble the husbandman who should hoard the seed which

he ought to have scattered over the ground ; or the traveller who should conceal the light by which his companions in a perilous way might have been saved from destruction.

3. Thirdly, we have placed *talent* among our resources for the conversion of sinners ; not, however, intending exclusively by this term the more splendid endowments sometimes bestowed upon mankind by a beneficent Creator.

It is obvious that a capacity of communicating what we know to others is a capacity likewise of rendering it subservient to their good ; and, in proportion to the facility and the persuasiveness with which this can be done, our means of promoting the welfare of others are increased. Whoever has the power of presenting to his fellow-sinners the things which belong to their peace in an instructive, convincing, and persuasive form, is in possession of an important instrument for their conversion.

Every one of you should inquire, therefore, with what portion of the gift of utterance God has endowed you. Whether it be little or much, according to its exact quantity it endows you with resources for the salvation of men.

You will, perhaps, be ready to acknowledge, as a general truth, that those who have a talent for speaking should employ it for God ; but you will be equally ready, it may be, to withdraw yourselves from this highly privileged class. "If I had talent, I would endeavour to use it ; but I really have no talent, and my attempting to communicate religious instruction is quite out of the question." It is an amiable piece of modesty to say that we have no talent, though I believe it is said by much the most freely when the duty of doing good is connected with it. Even if it were absolutely true, I do not know anything else besides the doing of good which is so exclusively left to the more talented portion of the community. Nobody is willing that persons of superior talents should be the only rich, or the only honourable, or the only successful, people in the world ; on the contrary, every one strives for his portion in these respects ; and this renders it very suspicious when the plea of no talent is adduced in bar of activity for God.

Without being tenacious on this point, however, and without wishing to persuade any person that he has more talent than he may acknowledge, I am ready to take the lowest ground, and to suppose myself addressing a pious

man who has nothing more than the ordinary gift of speech. This itself constitutes a talent for the conversion of sinners. Any person who can make himself understood on matters of common life, and can give intelligible utterance to ordinary emotions, is capable of expressing himself beneficially on subjects of eternal concern. The communication of religious knowledge, though it may be rendered more easy by the possession of eloquent gifts, is by no means dependent upon them. Uttered in the most homely phrases, or by the most stammering tongue, the truth of God is still itself, and is both adapted and adequate to accomplish its design. Every Christian who is not dumb has a talent for conversion. I am not concerned to say that it is a large talent. On the contrary, it may be very small; but to say that it is small is nothing to the purpose, when the burden of our exhortation is that, however small, it ought to be employed. To say that we have no talent is to utter a manifest untruth; either overlooking in fact, or neglecting on purpose, an undeniable measure of capacity for useful exertion.

It may be added, that a peculiar adaptation to usefulness attaches to the very persons who might with most plausibility maintain that they have no talent for conveying religious instruction. We always understand those most readily whose language and habits of thinking bear a resemblance to our own. When this is not the case in a considerable degree, the attempt to communicate knowledge is inevitably in some measure impeded, and very often partially frustrated. For this reason a considerable portion of ministerial labour is lost, especially upon the less-informed part of our congregations; for the same reason the conversation of more talented persons is, and must be, of inferior efficacy with the same class, because it is, and with every effort to remedy the evil, will still be, in a measure, unadapted to their comprehension. The humbler portion of society are far the most easily and effectually instructed by persons of their own order, whose manner of expression they at once understand, whose line of thought accords nearly with their own, and whose illustrations are drawn from sources with which they are familiar. So far, therefore, from our untalented friends having no fitness to labour for the conversion of sinners, their fitness is pre-eminent above that of all other persons for usefulness to those in the same walks of life with

themselves. If they should (as is sometimes the case) request a minister, or some other supposed more qualified person, to call upon a neighbour, the probability, and almost the certainty, is that their own conversation will prove the more acceptable and beneficial of the two. The mistake I am combating thus appears to be one of a peculiarly mischievous character, inasmuch as it not only keeps out of the field some labourers, but those best adapted for a very large portion of the work to be done. I charge it upon you, therefore, dear friends, even the least informed and the least capable among you, to remember that you are not without a talent for instruction, and one which you have probably never duly appreciated. It may not be large enough to exalt you in comparison with your fellow-men, but it is decidedly sufficient to fit you for usefulness.

To advert to a different class of persons. It would be amusing, if it were not too painful, to observe among those who plead that they have no talent for religious conversation, many whose talent for conversation of almost every other kind admits of no question. "We cannot talk upon religion." Astonishing! when you can talk so rapidly and so well upon almost everything else. You are afflicted with no hesitation in the chit-chat of familiar acquaintance, in general conversation with strangers, in settling matters of business, in discussing politics, or in discoursing of the sciences; but you cannot talk upon religion! There is something in that subject that makes your voice falter, and absolutely chokes your utterance! Ought not any person of common understanding to be ashamed of such a mere subterfuge from the sense of obligation, and the call to duty?

There are some, however, who must be conscious, and who would acknowledge, that their Maker has endowed them with larger powers of apprehending and exhibiting truth, or with more eminent aptitude for analyzing the character and reaching the heart of man. Scattered among the body of sincere Christians, there may certainly be found the power of luminous instruction, of convincing argument, of humbling reproof, of persuasive importunity; some persons surely must know that they possess a measure, perhaps an eminent measure, of these gifts; and what an immense accumulation of instrumentality for conversion is thus produced! These are the powers which move the world. They throw light upon

the blind eyes, and arouse the dormant passions of mankind. They give force to error, and work up the hearts of men to furious mischief. Equally adapted are they to give force to truth, and to subdue the proud and turbulent spirit to submission to the Saviour. Every man who has in his hands any share of this instrumentality is proportionately rich in resources for the conversion of his perishing fellow-mortals.

4. We have spoken of *property*, in the fourth place, as a part of our resources for the conversion of sinners. It is not that we attach any value, however, to such misnamed religion as may be purchased with money. The tribes of hypocrites, who seem devout for the sake of the benefits which may recompense their fraud, or who show their sanctimonious faces at a place of worship in order to link themselves with the charities and benefactions attached to it, cannot be looked upon without melancholy and loathing; nor can such an employment of money, whether covert or open, be contemplated without deep regret. The intention of the donor may be kind, but the effect of his gift is always mischievous. Neither do I now mean to advert to the power of wealth to advance Christianity by supporting the various societies which are in operation, more or less effectively, for this end. Such subscriptions, whatever be their value, most unhappily separate the apparent support of the cause of Christ from the exercise of *individual exertion*, and have had a most injurious effect upon the Christian world at large by presenting a plausible and acceptable apology for its neglect. The use of property to which I now refer as holding a place among individual efforts for the conversion of sinners, lies in the diffusion of religious knowledge by giving or lending copies of the sacred Scriptures, together with tracts and more considerable publications. The value and importance of such a mode of exertion are obvious. It is well known that many more persons can now read than at any former period; that multitudes in the lower classes are very defectively supplied with materials for satisfying this appetite of the mind; that the food they seek is too often of the pernicious rather than the salutary kind; and that works of frivolity, obscenity, and irreligion, are freely circulated, and almost thrust into their hands. It is ascertained, moreover, that the loan of tracts has, to a great extent, excited or discovered a thirst for more beneficial reading, and necessitated the establishment of

lending libraries. Those who employ themselves in actual endeavours of instruction speedily find, also, how important it is to induce persons with whom they converse to read upon the same subjects; and so, by bringing an additional power to bear upon ignorance and vice, to aid and prolong the efforts of their lips. The wide dispersion of tracts and small religious books has, in fact, been productive of immense advantages; and it is a method of usefulness which every one, who has it in his power, should pursue. What is in our power in this respect? A supply of tracts for distribution may be maintained at a very small expense, so that scarcely any person need be denied this privilege; and there must certainly be many by whom this method of useful activity might be carried *personally* to a very considerable extent. I say *personally*, because nothing else comes up to my meaning; and I deem it important that this kind of effort should not supersede, but, as far as possible, be associated with, direct conversation.

5. The next portion of our resources for the conversion of sinners consists in *influence*. Every measure of influence, though the smallest imaginable, has a manifest adaptation to the conversion of sinners. It may in any case be employed to gain attention to instruction, to induce a habit of consideration, to engage a perusal of the Word of God or of other profitable books, or to procure an abandonment of evil company, and an attendance on divine worship. In many instances it may be carried much further, as may appear from a passing glance at the different circumstances in which it may be exercised.

The influence of mere neighbourhood is not small, especially where an interchange of kind offices is kept up. That of familiar acquaintance is yet greater. Many things are done at the request, or at the recommendation, or even at the suggestion, of a companion. Still stronger than this is the influence of intimate friendship. Besides the opportunity which is thus afforded for direct and unrestrained fidelity, there arise from such a state some topics of very tender and powerful appeal. To the parental relation pertains influence of yet increasing power, especially if associated with a wisely cultivated affection. Parental instruction, reproof, and entreaty, have a force which nothing can exceed, which, perhaps, nothing can equal. The complete possession which may be

taken of the understanding, the authority with which the manifestations of evil may be rebuked and restrained, and the tenderness which may be thrown into appeals to the heart, are invaluable facilities for the work of conversion. Many a child who has been obstinate under every other consideration, has been melted to tears by the question, Shall we be separated for ever? The influence of the head of a family or an establishment extends also, with no inconsiderable force, over all its members. His instructions and counsels are of greater weight than those of other persons; while it is often in his power, without infringing on personal freedom, to restrain as well as to reprove the commission of iniquity. When persons hold a station of greater publicity, a corresponding extension of their influence is conferred. Their example then becomes more conspicuous, their recommendations more approaching to the authoritative. Here, however, it is needful to be especially cautious. The influence of public station and office has too often been exerted on a principle of interest or of constraint, rather tending to obstruct than to promote a just exercise of the understanding, or an appeal to the conscience and the heart: an *undue* influence which cannot be too much regretted, but against which it is perhaps very difficult to be sufficiently on our guard.

In the endless diversity of circumstances, it behoves each of us to inquire what influence pertains to us, and to reckon it all among our resources for the conversion of sinners. This is a means of operation of which no person can be entirely destitute. It necessarily arises out of the relations and circumstances of life, according to which, indeed, it may vary, but in no case can it be entirely wanting. A person who should imagine that he could exert no influence on religious subjects, need only be reminded of that which he knows he could exert upon general ones. There are certainly some persons who would oblige you at your request, at least in a way which put them to no trouble; and there are probably more who, at your importunity, would be willing to benefit themselves. You would not despair of inducing a sick neighbour to accept medical advice, especially if offered gratuitously, or the distressed to allow you to minister to their relief. What could be your meaning, therefore, if you should say you have no influence? It could mean only,

what I hope you do not mean, that you are not disposed to employ your influence for men's eternal welfare. I cannot be content, however, with maintaining the fact that you have *some* influence. I must urge you to examine the various aspects of your station in society, and to bring before yourselves *all* the influence which may arise from them. No part of it should be overlooked, when you are searching after means for the conversion of men.

6. Finally, an important part of our resources consists in *time*. Though many efforts to convert sinners may be made without any peculiar appropriation of time, yet there are others to which time is necessary, and an attention to which can be enlarged in proportion as leisure is enjoyed. Time, therefore, whatever portion of it may be available in our case for such occupations, is clearly to be considered as augmenting our means of useful activity.

What, then, are our circumstances in this respect? Though there are obviously some persons of great leisure, many of you perhaps are ready to say, "I would exert myself if I had time, but I really have no time." It is scarcely conceivable that any case can exist in which this can be strictly true. Even the busiest persons find time for almost everything which they deem interesting or important. That we can find other things to do, and that we are actually busily employed, may probably be the fact; but it will be difficult for any man to show that he could devote no time to the salvation of his neighbour, if he thought proper to do so. For purposes far less important than this, labourers will work over-hours, tradesmen will contrive means of leaving their shops under the care of others, and persons who are employed all the day will sit up a part of the night; so that, even with the really busy, the plea of want of time is only a cover for the want of heart. But with how many people is life in great part a busy idleness! Always doing something, indeed; but what? Things which are not worth the doing, perhaps, and which, at all events, it is not at all necessary to do. Supposing many occupations to be innocent, and even laudable, in comparison with endeavours to save sinners they are clearly light and unimportant. Let any observer of the world, and of the Christians who are scattered in it, reckon up the hours which are spent in frivolous conversation, in works of taste, in calls of ceremony, in long and

unprofitable visits, in scenes of relaxation and amusement, and then let him say what an immense portion of the resources available for the conversion of men is absolutely squandered and lost.

I press it, therefore, upon those of you who might with the greatest apparent justice affirm that you have no time to strive with men for their salvation, to re-examine this plea with an honest mind. Are you sure that you are even so busy as you suppose yourselves to be? Are there no considerable fragments of time actually unemployed, which are at present overlooked, but which might be brought to light by a diligent search? Are none of your occupations so light and immaterial that you might easily withdraw a portion of the time which is now devoted to them? Have you not some leisure in an evening? Might you not spend less time in light reading? Might not the hours allowed to company be abridged? Could you not sometimes rescue half an hour from business, or sometimes from sleep? If, in point of fact, anything were proposed to you which you felt to be interesting or important, would you not find time for it? Would you imagine that you had no time to save a man that was drowning, or to extinguish a fire in your neighbour's habitation? I cannot conceal my conviction that an estimate of time for any object is but an estimate of the importance of the object itself; and that no man who realizes the value of souls will find himself without time to save them. Remember, therefore, dear friends, that whatever time might, under a due sense of your obligation, be applied to this purpose, forms a part of your resources for it, the very resources after which we are inquiring.

Some of you are persons of manifest and acknowledged leisure. With much time at your own command, you are rich in resources for conversion. To what a considerable extent may you be employed in instructing the ignorant, in reclaiming the vicious, in guiding the disconsolate to the Saviour! Every hour which the duties of your station do not demand augments your capacity for the salvation of the lost.

Having thus exhibited to you, dear brethren, the directions in which our resources for the conversion of sinners are to be found, allow me to remind you that I have done so upon the supposition of your being *desirous to find them*. I

have taken it for granted that you felt the importance of cultivating the field which is before you, and that you wished to know what means of doing so were in your possession. I should be sorry if this discourse should make upon you such an impression as to show that I have been in error. Have you felt rather unhappy than otherwise, to learn that your resources for the conversion of sinners are so ample? Did you really cherish the imagination that you had few or no means of action, as comfortably shielding you from the exhortation to labour? Are you now indulging a querulous and half-captious spirit, ready to insist upon it that the view given of your resources cannot be a fair one? You *ought* to have received the hints which have been submitted to you in a very different spirit. It should have delighted you to discern that you have so many means of doing good. It should have made your heart leap for joy to know that, with such a wilderness before you, you are bearing so much of the precious seed which is adapted to render it fruitful in righteousness.

If you have received the suggestions I have presented to you in any measure of such a spirit, you will not now dismiss them from your remembrance, but will rather carry them to your chambers, and make them matter of deliberate and serious examination. You will ask, What are my individual resources for the conversion of sinners? Permit me to give you one caution as to the manner in which you allow yourselves to answer this question. It may seem to be a departure from humility to estimate your own resources highly, more especially, perhaps, as to character, knowledge, talent, or influence. You may deem it only modesty to make, not only the lowest estimate you can, but one even lower than you can with any sense of justice adopt. You should remember, however, that it is one thing to speak of our resources before men, and another to estimate them before God; it is one thing to survey them for purposes of complacency and self-gratulation, and another to calculate their capacities for useful exertion. It is in the former case only, I believe, that we are apt to overrate them; in the latter our chief danger is on the opposite side. We run little hazard of over-estimating our responsibility; while, on the contrary, the plausible and amiable pretext of humility may easily serve unjustly to reduce it. I do not wish you to

think your means of usefulness larger than they are; but, if you are not careful, you will infallibly think them smaller than they are. Be resolved to estimate them justly, that, as stewards, you may be found faithful.

Finally, when you have completed this inquiry, connect it with that which you have already made into your field of labour. Having first seen what you have to do, you now discern the instruments by which it is to be done. Remember that these instruments are given you for work, and not for amusement, and for work in the precise field which you have recently surveyed. Be up and doing, therefore! In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for he that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless return again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

LECTURE III.

CULTIVATING FITNESS FOR LABOUR.

“Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”—*Psalms* li. 13.

THE missionary accounts inform us of a Hottentot convert, who, for a time, absented himself from the exercises of Christian instruction and fellowship. Being asked upon his return why he had done so, he said, in substance, that, having seen some of his brethren called to somewhat difficult efforts of usefulness, he had been afraid lest he should be thought fit for similar exertions. It may be apprehended that a measure of the same spirit, though not expressed with equal simplicity, exists among some professors who are not Hottentots. If we suspected that we did possess talents for extensive usefulness, how eager would some of us be to keep it a secret, almost from ourselves, lest the voice of our brethren, or that of our own consciences, should summon us to unwelcome labour! On the other hand, what a comfortable thought it may be to others among us that we really have no considerable talent for beneficial exertion, and,

therefore, cannot be expected to do much, if anything, in that direction. How delightfully it lessens the weight with which the sense of duty, and of conscientious obligation, might otherwise bear upon us; and, by furnishing, if not a justification, yet a pretext, for inaction, enables us to settle down into a state of undisturbed and imperturbable repose!

Now I do not wonder that any person who first surveys the field of labour which is before him, and sees how large it is, and how barren, and who then estimates with any measure of justice his resources for its cultivation, and sees how ample they are, and well adapted to the end, should be oppressed with a sense of his unfitness for the task. You yourselves, dear brethren, have probably already said, "Who is sufficient for these things? If I had the most powerful talents, the most eminent piety, the most profound wisdom, they might all be employed in this field of labour. Nay, they are all wanted here; and the share of them which I possess is so small as to convince me that I am disqualified for producing any considerable effect. With *my* little gifts, and graces, and skill, what can I do for such an object as the conversion of these sinners to God?"

I am neither surprised nor sorry that such a sense of your deficiencies has fallen upon you; I should have been both sorry and surprised if it had not been so. Neither do I wish to dispel the feelings which have arisen upon this subject, founded, as in a great measure they unquestionably are, in truth, and capable as they are of receiving a most salutary direction. All that I ask of you is to deal with them as *active* Christians, and not as *slothful* ones. May I not hope that you will do this? Have you not been contending, and in some measure effectually, with the slothfulness of your own hearts? And is it not as Christians of an active spirit that you come hither to learn the practical methods of activity?

If it be so, I can without difficulty trace out the course you will pursue. In the first place, *you will not suffer yourselves to suppose for a moment, that, however great your deficiencies may be, you are totally disqualified for action. Some fitness for promoting others' good you have, if you are a Christian indeed; and this, however small, it is your duty and privilege immediately to employ.*

In the next place, *you will not allow yourselves to judge*

of your own deficiencies hastily, or superficially; or, above all, with a willingness to exaggerate them. Far, on the one hand, from indulging a spirit of pride or complacency in your qualifications for usefulness, you will feel, on the other, the obligation of estimating them with honesty and justice; lest merely imaginary defects should lead to real and criminal negligence. There are few things which, when we are called upon to do them for the first time, we do not imagine that we cannot do. This objection is always answered by saying, "*Try; you do not know what you can do till you try.*" A person disposed to work never hesitates to follow this advice; and, if you are in the spirit of an active Christian, you will never suffer yourselves to believe that you cannot labour for God *until you have tried* and found that you cannot.

In the third place, *you will regard your ascertained deficiencies with deep and unfeigned sorrow.* Instead of considering it as a *comfort* that your fitness for usefulness is small, you will deem it an affliction, and will place it among the heaviest of your griefs. You will dwell upon the importance and excellency of the object which you have so little adaptation to attain. It is the saving of souls from death; an object of incalculable interest, inasmuch as it involves the highest pleasures or the deepest pains of an eternal world. It has awakened the tender compassion of the whole Deity, and engaged the concurrent action of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It has drawn persuasion from the lips of the Saviour, tears from his eyes, and blood from his heart. It has awakened the sympathy of angels, and would have induced their willing exertions too, but that they are forbidden to employ them. It has engaged the deepest counsels of eternity past, and is to constitute the chief glory of eternity to come. And when you meditate on these topics, with grief you will say, "Is it such an object that I am so little qualified to pursue; an object in comparison with which everything else that can be done on earth dwindles into nothing?"

You will contemplate the peculiar relation which, as a Christian, you bear to the promotion of this end. You will recollect that your character is prepared for its attainment; since, in order to shine in the world, you are first made light in the Lord, and since you are fully impregnated with the heavenly qualities which you are expected to diffuse. You

will call to mind the obligation under which redeeming love has laid you, and the summons to labour which is so urgently and touchingly repeated by the voice of your dying and risen Lord; you will bear in memory the expectation which he has formed, both of your readiness to labour and of the results of your endeavours; you will not forget that if you, as one of his disciples, are not qualified to serve him, no other person can be expected to do so; and, musing upon these things, you will be ready to exclaim, "Woe is me, that my deficiencies are so great for the service of my Lord! The worldly, the gay, the profligate, the formal, will not, cannot, labour for him; and I, whom he has ransomed by his blood, and transformed by his Spirit, whom he has fitted to be useful, and expects to be laborious, I am in a grievous measure disqualified for exertion! What then am I fit for? Salt is good if it have a savour; but, if not, it is good for nothing, but is cast out, and trodden under foot of men. Is this my character? And am I really almost entirely wanting in that which constitutes the whole worth of a Christian in the world?"

You will bethink yourself, too, of the rich and exquisite delights by which endeavours for the conversion of sinners are recompensed. You know that the communication of benefits is always a luxury, and that this is the highest of all luxuries because it is the greatest of all benefits. To save a soul from death is infinitely more than to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to liberate the captive, to revive the dying. It is to snatch a brand out of the everlasting burnings, to lead the lost to the possession of immortal glory. Unutterable luxury on earth! What will it be in heaven? "But for acquiring these pleasures," you will say, "I have very little fitness. My want of talent and courage, of consistency and skill, excludes me from these joys. I can attain only the inferior delights of piety, and can never know the ecstasy of leading sinners unto Jesus."

In the midst of such reflections it will be impossible for you to look upon your deficiencies with complacency. *Think with comfort that they disqualify you for pious labour!* What man finds any comfort in knowing that his ignorance or want of education unfits him for rising in the world, or for improving the opportunities which are open to him of becoming rich and prosperous? And what Christian, but

one who loves his sloth and self-indulgence more than all that impels him to labour, can find *comfort* in his *unfitness for exertion*? No, dear brethren, view it aright and it will be your grief, a subject of perpetual and touching lamentation.

And this is not all. *You will*, in the fourth place, *entertain an earnest desire that your impediments to action may be removed*. You will not sit down contented in so afflictive a situation. With important and interesting objects in view, men have shown an intense eagerness to possess themselves of the qualifications necessary to their accomplishment; and, if you are truly awake to the value of the object before you, you will make restless inquiry whether the difficulties which surround you may not be overcome, and the deficiencies which obstruct you be supplied. Something like this will be your language: "Is there no way of augmenting my fitness for this blessed employ? Must I remain so afflictingly disqualified to be active, useful, and happy? May I not become more exemplary? Can I not pursue the acquisition of wisdom? May I not cultivate even defective talent? Will there be no recompense for diligent and vigorous endeavours like these?"

You will carry these inquiries to the throne of grace, and lay them before the Lord with urgent importunity that he would open your lips, and sanctify your heart; combining your earnest supplication with the sacred purpose, "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

Now, even if all such questions must be answered in the negative, if it were quite certain that our qualifications for useful activity never could be increased, this would form no good reason why our deficiencies should cease to be our affliction. Does a poor man cease to deplore his poverty because he has no hope of its mitigation? Do those who suffer pain bewail it less because it is incapable of relief? Does the captive less deeply lament his bondage because his chains are riveted on him for ever? No: and, if our hearts are right, even if our afflictive unfitness for activity were hopeless we should never cease to bewail it.

But it is not hopeless. If there is much to awaken an impulse to seek after growing qualifications, there is also much to encourage it; and it will be my present business to

show you that, by any person who will resolutely attempt it, much may be done in *cultivating fitness to labour for God*.

I. I may refer briefly to *the general grounds upon which such a representation may be established*.

It is to be presumed, then, that skilfulness in turning sinners to God, like the same quality in the pursuit of any other object, may be acquired by appropriate methods. All the arts and manufactures, the trades and professions, that are carried on in the world, are acquired by proper attention and instruction. No man possesses them at his birth, or becomes competent in them by magic. Every man *learns* the art or trade which he follows; and any ordinary profession may be acquired by a moderate use of our faculties. Now, admitting and duly estimating all the differences between the process of a sinner's conversion and every other object of human endeavour, yet, in as far as human endeavour or instrumentality is applicable to it, I am bold to ask why the method, or the art (I hope to use this term without being misunderstood), of turning sinners to God may not be acquired, as well as any other? What is there about it so peculiar as to baffle our efforts, and to defy a vigorous exertion for its attainment? It is simply the art of instruction and persuasion respecting divine things. But the art of instructing and persuading men is notoriously attainable by human industry, as thousands of instances prove; and, if any person who endeavours to do so may improve himself in the art of instructing and persuading men to evil, why not to good? Or, if in relation to temporal things, why not to spiritual? Our endeavours to convert sinners consist in nothing but the use of our natural faculties for this end; but the use of our natural faculties, in any case in which they can be used at all, is clearly capable of cultivation and improvement.

To this it may be added (and, though the remark is obvious, it is important) that, while the art of turning sinners to God may be acquired by appropriate efforts, it never can be acquired without them. Obvious as this sentiment is, it seems to have been strangely overlooked. Professors appear extensively to have regarded qualifications for usefulness as existing of themselves, or as springing up and ripening without cultivation. One person has them, another has them not; and this is supposed to be all that can be said on the

subject. Yet this is far from being the fact. No person, whatever may be his natural talents, becomes eminently fitted for usefulness without a sedulous cultivation of his powers. As every art must have a learning, so this is no exception to the rule.

In this view, even our very ignorance and unskilfulness afford us a ground of encouragement. For I suppose I may safely put the question to you, and to professors generally, What pains have you ever taken to acquire fitness for converting sinners? Recollect yourselves a moment. Some of you probably are struck by perceiving, perhaps for the first time, that you have never used any endeavours for this purpose; while few, if any of you, can say that they have been vigorous and habitual. Yet it seems marvellous to you that you are not eminently fitted to be useful! It would be marvellous rather if you were. Which of the ordinary occupations of life would you have been competent to perform, if you had taken no more pains to acquire it than you have to learn how to save souls? And is it this alone, of all things, that you expected to know without learning? And this object, the greatest and best of all, that you imagined you could be highly qualified to promote without the cultivation of your powers?

But, as I have said, connected as it is with inattention, our very unskilfulness may encourage us. It is not as though we had been using every endeavour to become wise, and after all were thus incompetent to our task. We have scarcely yet begun learning the alphabet of this science. All that may be attained by consideration, by discipline of heart, by nearness to God, and by prayer, all this remains to be attained by us. It is easy of attainment; it is ready to our hand; and it needs only a moderately diligent and vigorous use of our faculties to make the immediate acquisition of it. Much less trouble than we have taken to master the operations of the trade we follow, or those of ordinary domestic life, will put us into possession of inestimable treasures of wisdom, and go far towards removing the disqualifications we deplore.

II. We shall find this encouraging expectation confirmed, *if we look more particularly at those things in which eminent qualification for usefulness consists.*

1. And here we may notice, in the first place, what may

be called *natural fitness*; meaning by this term an aptitude for communicating instruction, a persuasive address, a talent for conversation. Such a talent obviously affords great facilities for religious usefulness, and is almost essential to any considerable qualification for it. It is a talent, moreover, which we find it very easy to persuade ourselves that we do not possess, and which, at the same time, we are apt to consider so exclusively in the light of a natural gift as to be quite beyond the hope of attainment. Now I am very far from calling into question the diversity of original talent, or from imagining that persons can give themselves what talents they please: I maintain, however, with entire conviction, that the mind of every sane person contains an elementary capacity for all useful and important pursuits; so that, while persons of peculiar constitutional talent may make more rapid and eminent attainments, any and every person, by a diligent and well-directed cultivation of his faculties, may make such as are respectable and sufficient for ordinary purposes. Nothing can be more obvious than the fact that, while few persons have great natural talents for poetry, music, or painting, a large number of those who have no considerable talent for these accomplishments make in them, nevertheless, very respectable acquirements. The principle I have laid down might be still more strikingly illustrated by a reference to the useful arts, which are acquired, in a degree sufficient for all valuable purposes, by persons of all degrees and all diversities of natural adaptation. We are warranted, therefore, in representing it as a general feature of providential administration, that, however original talent may vary, and splendid gifts may appear to raise one man immeasurably above another, a sufficiency of whatever is truly valuable is within the reach of every man.

Let this beneficial, and, as it appears to me, unquestionable, principle of the divine dispensations, be applied to such natural talents as may be needful to religious activity. Let it be taken for granted that you have not any large measure of a gift for instructive and persuasive converse, and even, if you please, that you are remarkably deficient in this respect; without saying that you can alter your natural constitution, or create for yourself original talent, we say without fear that, by a moderately industrious cultivation of your faculties, you may acquire a very valuable facility of religious conversation.

Of every one of the common arts of life you were once as ignorant as you now can be of the method of persuading sinners to be reconciled to God ; you have acquired them by your endeavours to learn, without having any extraordinary talent for any of them ; and in the same way in which you have acquired these you may acquire the art of turning sinners to God. What are these methods ?

The first of them is obviously *considerate effort*. To a person who performs any manual operation but indifferently, we naturally say, "Try to do it as well as you can ; be attentive ; mind what you are about." In ordinary cases it is very well known that such trials both develop capacity, and strengthen it. If you wish, therefore, to augment your capacity for religious conversation, I say to you : Try to do it as well as you can. Do it, not heedlessly, but considerately, and with preparation. Call to mind the object you have in view ; prepare yourself with topics suited to your purpose ; bestow attention and care upon the execution of your design ; aim at improvement ; and this very exercise of your powers will invigorate them.

The advantage thus acquired is increased by *repeated effort*. As no art is perfectly acquired at once, so multiplied efforts are never made without a proportionate increase of skill. What we do often we infallibly do easily, and, if we try, we shall do it well. Our early endeavours in religious conversation and address may have been attended with many defects, and may have oppressed us even with a heavier sense of our unfitness than we had ever before suffered ; but this should by no means discourage us. No person ever made a pin well the first time ; but practice leads the learner forward, even to perfection. If you make a proper use of your failures in one attempt, they will increase your wisdom for the next ; and it is impossible that a series of such efforts should be made without a very valuable measure of success. You yourselves do not believe that you could pursue such a course for ten years, or for one year, and have no more talent for religious conversation at the close of this period than you have at present.

It must be added, that a talent for religious conversation may be promoted, in many cases, by a little *discipline of the heart*. Our attempts in this direction are sometimes embarrassed by our feelings. We could converse on any other

subject; but, when we think of conversing upon religion, we are taken with such a trepidation, we are so nervous, that our very voice is choked, and we cannot speak. Now, without denying that all or some of this may be constitutional, and admitting readily that, whether constitutional or not, it is trying, I must still say that such feelings as these are capable of regulation, and that, for any important object, we know what it is to control them. What man or woman suffers them to stand permanently in the way of their promotion and advancement in life? And how long would they obstruct our religious activity, if we realized the infinite value and importance of the end to be attained? Or, if every one who is liable to a little nervousness and trepidation in bringing forward serious conversation is entitled to abandon the attempt, where is the person who might not find a screen for his taciturnity?

If I have brought home to you, dear brethren, any conviction that, for all useful purposes, a talent of religious conversation may be successfully cultivated, even by those who may possess the least of it as a natural gift, let me press it upon you to commence the process. Do not any longer imagine that even a real want of natural talent denies you the attainment of an ample fitness for exertion. If you have not an aptitude at pious converse, acquire it; just in the same way as you would apply yourselves to the mastery of any domestic process, or professional operation, with which you might find yourselves unacquainted. Let me press it upon you, also, to commence this cultivation of your talents *without delay*. Procrastination increases its difficulty, both because the cultivation of natural talent becomes less easy as life advances, and because an habitual neglect demands ultimately a more strenuous effort for its destruction. In this respect persons young in piety and young in life possess immense advantages over others. Only begin the cultivation of your talents for usefulness, dear young friends, at this period of your course, and many difficulties which now impede the activity of your seniors will never occur to you at all. To them, in fact, they are in great part the mere production of indulged and confirmed habits. They feel themselves unfitted now for religious converse and address chiefly because they have never been used to it; and, when they would exert themselves, they are embarrassed by little more

than the rigidity resulting from the inaction of so many preceding years. Had those who are now aged studied and practised from their youth the art of persuading men to repentance, they would now have been masters in a science in which many of them are babes ; and, instead of having a number of old professors who, for the most part, shrink from efforts of usefulness, and really do not know how to address fifty people for their souls' good, or to converse with ungodly individuals for the same end, we should possess in them at this moment an invaluable body of instructors. Such, I hope, the next generation of old professors will be ; but it is for you who are now young to see that it shall be so, by a diligent cultivation of those natural powers which every man possesses in a sufficient degree, and which, if cultivated, will render the experience and wisdom of your later years a treasure for the benefit of the world.

2. A second portion of the qualifications for usefulness may be expressed by the term *moral fitness*. It consists mainly of three branches : the first is an established and eminent spirituality of mind ; the second is an exemplary consistency of conduct ; and the third is an adequate command of temper. A sense of deficiency in these things is, perhaps, not an unfrequent hindrance to religious activity, especially in the family or other circles, in which our character is more continually subject to observation. When some opportunity of useful converse arises, and we are sufficiently alive to it to perceive that it ought to be improved, we feel, perhaps, that we are at the time in so dull and stupid a frame, our thoughts so absorbed in earthly things, or our feelings so far from spiritual, that we are unfit for the effort ; we cannot say anything about religion in such a state of mind : or it may be that we have not long before shown some unchristian temper, either of passion, or pride, or levity, or want of uprightness ; so that the very thought of inculcating religion upon another too severely reproves ourselves, while we know that our inconsistencies would furnish an unanswerable pretext for the evasion of our exhortations : or, perhaps, we fear to speak because we have found ourselves in similar attempts liable to lose our temper, and to manifest a degree of petulance and irritation tending to destroy the effect of the most touching truths. These things constitute, it is true, a grievous unfitness for usefulness ; but the want

of this kind of fitness is surely not insuperable. Spirituality, consistency, and self-control, are clearly parts of Christian character, and capable of successful cultivation by Christian industry. Let it only be our concern to retire more resolutely from the world, and to draw nearer to God; to look more intently at the things which are not seen, and to dwell more solemnly on the powers of the world to come; let us only be more in the presence of our ascended Lord, and more importunate for the influences of his blessed Spirit; let us only make a more thorough examination of our own hearts, and subject them more deliberately to the subduing and sanctifying influences of the love of Christ; let us only associate the more vigorous exercises of the closet with a more watchful and prayerful spirit in the world; and these qualifications will be continually on the increase. There is no eminence in these which, if we choose, we may not attain.

3. A third portion of fitness for spiritual usefulness may be called *practical fitness*, or skill, an aptness in conducting religious conversation *well*, so as to engage attention, to touch the feelings, to reach the conscience, to meet objections, to remove cavils, and in all respects to be adapted to the character addressed, and productive of the best effect. Now this requires, not merely a well-cultivated talent for conversation, but an eminent degree of wisdom in the management of conversation in particular cases. Of such wisdom we may all of us well say that we possess but little. In how many cases does our experience painfully convince us of the fact! How often do we find ourselves at a loss to understand a character, to select suitable topics, to find the best method of attacking a manifest evil, or to withdraw persons from a maze of errors, and a labyrinth of vain objections! Sometimes it may seem useless for us to continue or to renew the attempt; and, in truth, it is of the utmost importance that our wisdom should be increased. But this also *may* be increased; cultivation will not be lost upon it.

Much in this respect may be learned from an attentive *study of the Scriptures*. We should not forget that God has to do with the same characters which perplex and embarrass us, and in the same methods of instruction and persuasion which he commands us to employ. In the Bible we shall see how he treats them. Their portrait is there, with the statements, exhortations, and motives which divine wisdom

has thought adapted to convict, to arouse, and to subdue them. Make it your endeavour to trace the description and the treatment of different characters in the Word of God; and, when you thus learn to understand them, treat them accordingly. Remember that the method in which they are treated in the Scripture is the wisest and the best; and the only one in which you can expect success, because it is the only one in which you can expect the divine blessing. If I might obtain particular attention to this remark, I would earnestly press it; since I am convinced that the treatment of ungodly persons, even by those who sincerely strive for their conversion, is to a great extent unscriptural, and that for this reason the heart and conscience answer to it so feebly.

An additional help to the skilful treatment of others, will be found in the *study of your own heart*. For your own heart contains in embryo, if not in actual development, everything which exists in the bosom of another. To understand the mysteries of the breast into which you are desirous of introducing the light of divine truth, or of pouring its sanctifying streams, it is only needful that you should comprehend yourself. Get a large acquaintance with your own heart in its deep-seated corruption and enmity to God, in its evasiveness and treachery, in its flatteries and inconstancy; trace the manner in which instruction and conviction came home to your own conscience, and the motives which operated to your release from the bonds of iniquity; call to mind the unanswerable truths which silenced all your objections, and made you stand speechless, though condemned, before God; and you will become profoundly wise to win souls to Christ.

You will do well, also, to accustom yourself to the *study of mankind*. Though human character is, in its general principles, so uniform that every man may be regarded as an epitome of his race, it is also of such endless diversity in its development that every individual is worthy of a separate study. Have your eye open to the various phases of character which pass before you; mark the differences of constitutional temperament, the influence of predominant passions, the effect of circumstances and association, the force of early opinion and prevailing prejudice, the unmeaning acquiescence, the captious cavil, the petulant repulse; for every observation of this sort will be an additional lesson of

wisdom, teaching you more fully what men are, and with what arms you must contend against their iniquities. In such a cause as this no Christian need despair of attaining eminent practical skill, and of becoming a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.

Such are the methods, dear brethren, by which fitness for labour may be cultivated. I have now only to ask you, *whether you will pursue its cultivation*. In establishing its possibility, I will not believe that I have taken away one of your remaining *comforts* by robbing you of what you have regarded as a permanent plea for inaction. I hope rather that I have presented to you a remedy for no inconsiderable sorrow. If, desiring to be useful, you have been weighed down by a sense of your unfitness for it, you will now lift up your head with joy, saying to yourself, "Everything needful to render me eminently useful may be acquired. Delightful thought! I am not, then, doomed to a hopeless unfruitfulness. I need not repine at the sight of more splendid talents, or of a superior education. I need not sit down amidst my own many infirmities in despair."

I know that the cultivation of useful talent will add to your labour. But does that dismay you? How many persons, in order to acquire something conducive to an earthly object, have risen early in the morning, and sat up late in the evening, and made efforts as willing as they were strenuous! What would we ourselves not do to acquire a language, or an art, by which we should gain a thousand, or even a hundred, pounds? Shall our neglect of the cultivation of fitness for usefulness proclaim the fact, that we do not estimate the conversion of, perhaps, many sinners worth anything like so much as these comparatively paltry and insignificant gains?

Allow me to close this address with one word of caution. *Do not wait for an increase of qualification before you begin to act*. As you are you can do something, and amidst dying souls not a moment should be wasted. Besides which, if you do nothing to-day your only opportunity may be lost; to-morrow you yourself may be in eternity. *Neither suffer yourself, upon any particular occasion, to be hindered from action by conscious unfitness*. Though you might exert yourself more pleasantly and more beneficially if it were otherwise, do not therefore omit the good which you may still

accomplish, and thus voluntarily aggravate the inevitable mischief of your state. Finally, *whatever advances you make in fitness for labour, be sure that you bring it all into action.* Remember that you are not amassing a treasure for yourself, but for others; that it is not to be hoarded, but to be spent; and that you mean to be as laborious as you are endeavouring to become wise. See that you fulfil the vow which you have associated with your prayer, "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

LECTURE IV.

PREPARING FOR ACTION.

"Him that girdeth on his harness."—1 *Kings* xx. 11.

DEAR brethren, I have hitherto been engaging you to survey your field of labour, and not only justly to estimate, but diligently to augment your resources for its cultivation. It is now time to descend from these more general to more particular topics. If anything is really to be done for God or for the souls of men, the work must be taken up, not in the gross, but in detail. We must not content ourselves with contemplating, perhaps, a large number of objects, and saying, "I have to attempt all these;" but, as we can do only one thing at a time, we must proceed to take up individually the efforts which are incumbent upon us, and address ourselves to that which is appropriate to the present hour. Without this, it is very possible for a general perception and conviction of duty to exist in combination with perpetual sloth. I hope, dear brethren, that you are no strangers to those vigorous exercises by which a sense of obligation is rendered practical and influential, the impulse and the guide, rather than the torment and the reproach, of your daily life. You thus exemplify the Christian *preparing for action*, and will kindly accept from me a few counsels adapted to this difficult and important part of your proceedings.

I need not detain you by any lengthened observations on

the benefit or the importance of preparation for your attempts to turn sinners unto God. Its advantage is obvious. Whatever it is worth while to do at all it is worth while to do well, and nothing can be done well without an endeavour to do so. Heedlessness is never connected with eminence in any department of exertion; but, on the contrary, it inevitably gives a character of inferior workmanship, even to the simplest operations. If endeavours for the conversion of sinners, therefore, stood only on the same level with the ordinary occupations of life, they should, like them, be associated with preparatory thought; but how much more, when we consider the far higher rank which they occupy? No efforts contemplate so important an object; none require so much wisdom; none meet with so many obstructions; in none is success so valuable, or so difficult: least of all, therefore, in this direction can we expect to operate wisely or successfully without preparation. It is a line in which inconsiderate efforts run the utmost hazard of being, not only fruitless, but injurious. We may derive from them in the retrospect much cause of lamentation and of shame, but we shall see little matter for satisfaction, or of joy. If this be not the issue that we wish, if we are desirous of having a recompense for our labour, or, at all events, of showing ourselves to be workmen who need not be ashamed, every effort should be made with a previous exercise of thought and discipline of heart commensurate with the importance of the work, and the value of its result.

To pass on, however, from this general and obvious sentiment, let me direct your attention to *the objects which should be principally aimed at in your preparatory exercises*. For the sake of doing so more distinctly, I will take a specific case, and suppose that in your morning retirement you are contemplating some special effort; as, for example, your sectional visits in a Christian Instruction society, a call upon an ungodly neighbour, conversation with a brother or a sister, or some other among the thousand methods of religious usefulness. Your devout endeavours to prepare yourself for this effort should be directed to *the formation of the purpose, the selection of the means, the cultivation of the temper, and the supplication for the divine blessing*.

I. The first of these objects is *the formation of the purpose*. This is manifestly of the first importance, inasmuch as the

purpose is the direct impulse of action. Knowledge leads to action only by generating a purpose to act; and, if such a purpose be wanting, however clear our perception and ample our information, action can never be produced by it. It is true, that the knowledge of reasons why we should exert ourselves is in itself adapted to awaken a resolution to do so; but it by no means necessarily, or uniformly, produces this effect. Its just influence always may be, and in many cases is, counteracted by other causes. To take for illustration the example which is now before us. You clearly see, perhaps, and are fully convinced, that it is your duty to make an effort for the conversion of some particular sinner, and you are well acquainted with the various motives adapted to quicken you to the effort; but is your knowledge connected with an actual intention to acquit yourself of the obligation? Are you in the attitude of resolution for immediate action? Do you not know what it is to find the knowledge of your duty combined with a great disinclination to perform it? Or, if not with a positive disinclination, yet with a large degree of apathy and irresolution?

Now this is an evil which requires our immediate and earnest care. In whatever measure adequate resolution is wanting, the main spring is wanting by which exertion is to be originated and sustained. The generation of a decided and glowing purpose should be our first aim. I know that the task will not be an easy one. Even if there were no external difficulties, the carnality of our own hearts would present no inconsiderable obstacle; while it constantly facilitates the invention of others, or their aggravation in whatever measure they may exist. As you cannot regard such a state with complacency on the one hand, so neither, on the other, should you contemplate it with despair. You find herein that your heart needs discipline, and you will proceed to discipline it accordingly. You will enter into converse with yourself in some such method as this. "Here is an opportunity of promoting another's spiritual good; why am I not ready to improve it? It is an effort which I *may* make, which I *can* make, which I *ought* to make. I shall be aiming to impart the highest possible benefit to another; I shall be securing the richest luxury for myself. If I am indeed pious, it is an effort for which my character is adapted, and with which my heart is congenial. The voice

of my Saviour calls me to it; it is the way in which he wishes me to glorify his name, and to testify my gratitude for his love. And yet I cannot make up my mind to do it! What can be the meaning of this? Is pity for the souls of men, is my duty to God, is love to the Saviour; is consistency, is every consideration to lift up its voice in vain? Do I mean, here in my chamber, in the immediate presence of eternal things, and of Him who loved me and gave himself for me, to refuse his call, and to say I will not obey? What then am I? What can I be? Where is my love for the Saviour, where my devotedness to his glory, where my pity for the lost? In the face of this unmovable apathy, am I still going to believe that any of these feelings prevail within me?—But *whence* is it that such considerations do not move me? Am I turning away from them, as though I were unwilling that they should produce upon me their just influence? O my soul, beware of such guilty treachery to thyself and to thy Lord! Is it that I am embarrassed by bashfulness and timidity? Yet I surely ought to mortify these feelings at the voice of my Redeemer, and for the accomplishment of so blessed an end. Is it that I imagine I cannot speak or act in the case with effect? At all events I can try, and I never shall acquit myself of my duty if I do not. Is it that I fear the consequences, and am unwilling to hazard the unpleasantness which might result from my endeavours? Yet what sacrifices ought I not cheerfully to make for Him who bore such griefs for me? Is it a kind of effort which is new to me? Then my past neglect should quicken my present activity. Is it that others are slothful? Their guilt can afford me no justification. What else obstructs me? Let me try every pretext, and penetrate every disguise; and, if nothing impedes me but what will not bear examination, nothing but what ought to be sacrificed at my Redeemer's footstool, by all that is consistent or faithful, grateful or devoted, I charge my heart to slay it in his sight. I *must* go and labour. How can I bear to be the murderer of souls, or a traitor to the sovereign of my heart!"

I give you this merely as an example of those exercises of meditation which, of course, will be thrown into endless diversity by diversities of character and circumstances. You will not use such a method without an ample recompense. The purpose to act for God, if ever it exists on rational

grounds, arises out of such considerations as these, and out of them, when vigorously presented to the heart, it will infallibly arise. Whatever efforts for conversion you contemplate, make it a point thus closely to converse with your own heart, until you have awakened a firm and steady purpose for the deed.

II. Your preparation should be directed, secondly, to *the selection of the means*. It would be egregious folly to attempt to do all things in the same method. Every object has means peculiarly appropriate to its attainment, and much of the wisdom and success of our efforts lies in the selection and arrangement of them. When you have resolved, therefore, to make an effort for the conversion of a particular person, ask yourself by what means you shall seek to accomplish the end. Let the various methods which may be employed be set before you, and consider which of them may be best adapted to the case. The most natural and obvious is conversation; but, as there may be occasions on which this may not be suitable or practicable, consider whether the writing of a letter may be preferred; or whether the recommendation of a book, or placing one so that it may be taken up as by accident, may be all that the case will properly admit of. Let me only say, that the decision of such points should be referred neither to rashness on the one hand, nor to prudence on the other; but to honest Christian wisdom. If on some occasions it may be necessary to rein in our zeal, on many more it may be requisite to apply the spur to our cowardice. It is obvious that such points as these are to be determined with more facility and wisdom by previous consideration, than if left to perplex us at the moment when the opportunity of action arrives. The neglect of such consideration may give to the best intended exertions a lamentable character of heedlessness and indiscretion.

If you have determined on some mode of direct communication, as in a great majority of cases you may, prepare yourself for it by a judicious selection of topics. Fitted as every part of divine truth is for usefulness, circumstances give a peculiar fitness to certain parts of it in certain cases, and at certain times. In a given instance, one portion of truth may be more especially congenial with the exercises of your own mind, with some local or passing associations, or, above all, with the character, temper, habits, or degree of

knowledge, of the person you address. I am not now insisting upon so obvious a truth as that our conversation should be adapted to such circumstances, but upon the necessity of using *previous care* for this purpose, whenever it is possible. We shall in this way secure the adaptation we desire much more extensively than in any other. Even if we possess a considerable measure of readiness for useful religious conversation (which, perhaps, we may scarcely be willing to affirm), we should not trust ourselves to the suggestions of the moment when opportunity for consideration may be attained. It should be our endeavour also to furnish ourselves for conversation upon the topics we have chosen. Conversation without thought is apt to be desultory and incoherent. We naturally, and almost inevitably, find it difficult to pursue any subject on the instant, even with tolerable closeness or effect; while, without being adepts in study, a few minutes' devotional consideration of the theme would afford invaluable aid.

To illustrate what I mean by an example. The person you intend to address presents a particular aspect of ignorance upon the subject of inward depravity; he thinks that his heart is good, and that he never meant any harm. You wish to lead him to more accurate views of himself, and you mean to make this the subject of your next conversation. The interview arrives; and, if you enter upon it without preparation, you find your address far less convincing than you could have desired, and the success of it very small. This is just what you might have expected, and what the preparation I am recommending would enable you to avoid. If, previously to such an interview, you will seriously think what the evidences of the heart's corruption are; what are the most striking general manifestations of it; which are most likely to come home to the particular case; and how the spirit of self-complacency may be most effectually destroyed, you will obviously be much better fitted for the conversation, and can hardly fail to conduct it with greater power.

There is the more importance in this subject, because there is reason to believe that, in many recent efforts to do good, the religious conversation has been limited to a few cursory remarks, or expressions of good-will and earnest concern. Now I ask, and I may reasonably ask, whether

we can expect to slay the reigning passions of ungodly men by such weapons as these. What is here of the vivid presentation of truth, or its forcible application? What evil is skilfully attacked? What holy disposition is it judiciously attempted to awaken? And what results can be anticipated from such superficial and slender efforts? Verily, just what we see; the evil spirit continuing unbound and rampant in the breast.

If we say that it is high time this mode of proceeding was altered, we shall be told, perhaps, that this is all which Christians at large can do; and that the studied conversation of which we have spoken is competent only to ministers, and persons of a superior order. But we deny this altogether. Without undervaluing the advantage of habits of disciplined thought, we may safely affirm that the possession of experimental piety capacitates every man, who will converse considerably upon religious topics, for conversing with substantial method and wisdom. The least informed and most illiterate Christian is competent to meditate upon the Word of God in its various bearings upon the heart of man, illustrated as they are by its influence on his own; and, by the moderate exercise of such meditation, he may furnish himself for converse of the most beneficial kind. But this plea is brought forward much too soon. The matter has not yet been put to the test. Private Christians have not generally begun to try to converse as well as they can. There is, for the most part, no attempt made to furnish themselves for anything beyond a few desultory words, so that what they *can* do is a thing hitherto quite unknown. When they have done what they can, we shall readily admit the plea we have been considering in lieu of the rest.

III. Preparation for efforts of usefulness should be directed, in the third place, to *the cultivation of the temper*; taking the word *temper* in such a latitude as to comprehend generally the spirit in which they are undertaken.

One point in this department which demands very serious regard, is *the motive* under which we act. It is clear that it is both right and important for our endeavours for the good of souls to be actuated by the grand motive of the Gospel, an ardent concern for the glory of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ. No further than they are so are they evidential of a proper character in us, or acceptable in the sight of

a heart-searching God. Yet it is by no means to be presumed that this motive is in due operation, even in so sacred a work as the conversion of sinners. If you look carefully within, you may find, perhaps greatly to your own surprise, that there is scarcely any conscious operation of motive at all; especially when the effort, as among visitors of a Christian Instruction Society, or in other cases, has a measure of regularity about it. Or, if you are not so engaged merely because it is such an hour or such a day, you may be so because others are, or because it is expected of you, or for some other reason far below the great impulse of a heart dedicated to the Saviour. You should be very much aware of this lowering and mixture of motive; and you will by no method so effectually prevent it as by the preparatory exercises I have recommended to you. Examine seriously what your motives are, whether you are impelled by unworthy or subordinate ones, and whether the grand motive of love to Christ is in due exercise. See that, by meditation on his love, your love to him is awakened afresh; let your intended effort be made a fruit of the living tree of consecration to God which is implanted within you; and as such let it be presented, before you make it, at his footstool to whom your whole heart and life are dedicated. Be not satisfied till you can say, "Lord, I do this for thee, and for thy glory."

Another point demanding notice is *the temper*, strictly speaking, in which our efforts shall be conducted. In this respect danger arises from that love of censure which belongs to our fallen nature. We are too likely to be pleased with an opportunity of finding fault, or with feeling that we have a right to do so. Hence, if we are not wary, the statements which we are called upon to make to men respecting their sin and misery may be thrown into a tone of censoriousness and denunciation greatly adapted to defeat their end. While upon no account we should be deterred by mere *imputations* of harshness from an unflinching fidelity, we should carefully endeavour to avoid the reality of it. For this end a portion of our preparatory thoughts should be applied to the cultivation of a compassionate spirit. We should set before us the person at whose conversion we mean to aim in aspects adapted to excite our pity, and stir up those yearnings of mercy within us which will make us weep while we accuse, and teach us to utter cutting truths with a melting tenderness.

Besides this, it should be our care to be well secured against *irritation*: an evil not always avoided, nor always easy to be avoided, in religious conversation. We are apt to become fretted by those whose ignorance does not speedily give way to instruction, more especially if they should, in our judgment, exhibit stupidity or perverseness. Much that may be deemed of this character is liable to occur in efforts of religious instruction, not only through the blindness of the natural man, but through an unwillingness to be drawn from sinful ways; and sometimes the very endeavour to convince may be made an occasion of resentment or insult. Nothing can be more undesirable than that our passions should be inflamed by any occurrences of this sort, or that a word or a tone expressive of petulance should escape from our lips. Our guard in this respect requires to be set before we enter upon our labour. We should steadily contemplate the probability of such trials, and fortify ourselves beforehand, by considerations which will readily occur to us, against their influence. We should never regard ourselves as prepared for the work, until we are consciously ready to encounter perverseness with patience, and to repay insult with love.

We need to be yet further armed with *discretion*. For, even when our plan is laid, and everything, as we may imagine, skilfully prepared, it may be by no means practicable with wisdom to carry it into direct and complete execution. Circumstances may arise adapted to induce us, either to relinquish what we did intend, or to do what we did not, or in a thousand ways to modify the execution of our purpose. We should never so fix our plan as to be unprepared or unwilling to change it. We should keep an open eye, and maintain an enlarged observation of circumstances, in order warily to avoid whatever might diminish the good effect of our endeavours, or, perhaps, turn them to mischief. If we should fail to do so, the best intended efforts may become liable to such charges of obtrusiveness, impertinence, or other evils, as not only to frustrate our purpose for the present, but to forfeit our influence for the future, and to place a stumbling-block in the way of others as well as ourselves. This spirit of watchfulness, like all other right feelings, requires to be cultivated beforehand, in order to be ready for use when the occasion arrives. In our preparatory exercises, therefore, it should as truly be our

endeavour to arm ourselves with discretion as with courage; and the more so because, so liable are we to extremes, in our efforts to awaken courage discretion is unusually likely to be forgotten.

IV. Your preparation for efforts of usefulness should comprehend, lastly, an earnest *supplication for the divine blessing*. You will acknowledge in a moment that this is a matter of the utmost importance.

You will want it *to help you in your labour*. For, when you come to put into execution what you have designed, you will find the same evils in your heart with which you have been contending in your closet; while the spirit of devout consecration, which you were endeavouring to cherish there, will have lost some of its vigour. Upon a moment's consideration, and perhaps without it, you will find yourself entirely helpless and unfit for your work, but in the strength of divine grace. It may be sought, indeed, by an inward prayer at the moment; but it is highly important that it should be previously sought, and that fervent supplications should arise from your retirement for mercy to be communicated in your labour. With how much more comfort will you proceed amidst your conscious and multiplied infirmities, when you know that you have previously engaged the help of your Father who is in heaven! With how much more cheerfulness may you expect that succour, when you know that you have acknowledged your poverty before him, and besought him to pour into your earthen vessel of his heavenly treasure!

You will want the blessing of God *to give you success*. It is not that the adaptation and sufficiency of the means you employ are for a moment to be questioned; but that the success of means *in all cases* depends upon the divine blessing. In the natural world, if you plant or water it is God who gives the increase, and it is the same in the spiritual world. No blind eyes will be opened, no sinners will be turned from the power of Satan unto God, unless the Lord be with you; in any other case ignorance and sin will bid defiance to all your exertions, and the foul spirits that reign in the world will laugh you to scorn. You have surely seen enough of the blindness and stubbornness of ungodly men to remove all doubt of this truth. You have seen how little favour the declarations of God's Word meet with in the carnal heart;

how quickly and perseveringly the eye is turned from spiritual to temporal things; how deeply rooted the dominant passions are; and how tenaciously beloved iniquities are clung to, in defiance of everything that is either just, or terrible, or attractive; and I might ask you whether it is in *your own* strength that such obstacles as these can be overcome. The strong man in armed possession of his house might say to you, as the demons at Ephesus to the sons of Sceva, "Jesus I know; but who are you?" and the little fruit of labours carried on in a spirit of self-confidence would speedily convince you of your weakness. There is one power, and only one, to which the carnal heart will bow; and that power it should be your earnest aim to engage on your side. If, indeed, you are willing to labour in vain, if it will be satisfactory to you to see the field submitted to your cultivation still barren in righteousness, and producing luxuriantly the thorns and briers which fit it for the burning, then go to your occupation alone; contend with the carnal heart in your own strength, and this result will assuredly follow. But if, as doubtless is the case, you long to see a blessed result from your toil; if you wish to see the wilderness in which you labour become as the garden of the Lord; if you yearn over perishing souls, and pant to rescue them from the wrath to come; then I beseech you to cherish the deepest sense of your own insufficiency, and of the inefficacy of every means apart from almighty grace. Lay your contemplated efforts in unfeigned humiliation before the mercy-seat, and with all the ardour of your mind implore the Father of mercies to bestow the success by which his name shall be glorified. Attempt nothing until you have associated it with the earnest prayer, "O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity." If you find yourself deficient in the appreciation of your own weakness, as you often may, look upon that deficiency as an evil which urgently requires to be rectified. Give your own heart no rest until you feel rightly upon so important a subject; and then give the Lord no rest until he hear and answer your prayer. Tell him that you cannot go without him to a battle, in which without him you are sure to be defeated; and appeal to him in the words of one of his ancient friends, "If thy presence go not with me, carry me not up hence."

There is the greater need that our exercises in this respect

should be deep and earnest, because of the principles by which the divine administration is governed. "Them that honour me," saith the Lord, "I will honour." It is in proportion to the degree in which we cultivate right feelings towards him that he will afford tokens of his favour to us. This is just. The glory of his name is the ultimate end of all his ways, and he will not give it to another. When we fail to observe and to acknowledge the station which he holds as the giver of all good, or to place ourselves in our due position of dependence and supplication, we fail to render him the glory which is due from us unto his name; and we assume an attitude, in which if he were to grant us tokens of favour, it would be departing from the great principle of his government, and be smiling upon what he disapproves. A spirit of self-annihilation, therefore, is immensely important to our success. It draws God towards us. It puts us in the posture in which his amplest blessing may be expected. While the contrary spirit repels him, and makes it necessary that he should leave us to learn, by bitter experience, the error and the folly of our self-complacency. There is no inconsiderable need of exercising ourselves on this point. In doctrine nothing is more clearly proved, or more readily admitted; but the state of feeling is sometimes far from corresponding with the doctrine. We never justify self-confidence; but, if we would examine, we should find that we often indulge it: or, which is the same thing, that we are very far from being duly impressed with the necessity of divine influence, and duly importunate for it. We may recollect, perhaps, many occasions upon which our endeavours for the conversion of sinners have not been connected with exercises of humiliation and prayer at all commensurate with the facts and truths which we acknowledge. Till we learn more eminently to honour God, we cannot expect to be eminently honoured by him.

It is a further advantage of such preparatory exercises of humiliation and prayer, that they augment our actual fitness for labour. I am well aware that they do not increase our *comfort* in it; but how many times have you yourselves found, or have others told you, that, so far as *usefulness* can be traced, it is far from being most abundant when we have been most comfortable? Upon the contrary, and, perhaps, very much to our surprise, those efforts which we have made

under the most afflicting sense of weakness and insufficiency have subsequently appeared to have been most copiously blessed. The fact is, that a painful sense of weakness imparts an earnestness and cogency to the manner which greatly augments its adaptation to the end designed, and renders a person in such a state of mind much more likely to succeed than one in the lighter spirit of easy expectation; while it tends likewise to keep the eye continually up to heaven, and to associate every word that is poured into the ear of man with an ardent aspiration to that of the Most High.

It is highly delightful, and should be earnestly coveted, to go forth to endeavours for the conversion of sinners under a *consciousness* that God is with us. In answer to earnest prayer we know not how often such a felicity may be granted us. We should not, however, be discouraged if we do not attain it. The Lord *may be* with us in our work, though we have not the sweet anticipation of his presence; and, if we have earnestly besought him, he *will*. He whom we have sought in secret may reward us openly, when the exercises of the closet have witnessed little but severe, and apparently unsuccessful, wrestlings.

These preparatory exercises I have exhibited to you, for the sake of distinctness, in connexion with some specific exertion contemplated in your retirement; but, inasmuch as many efforts of this class cannot be so singled out, inasmuch, indeed, as we are called to be habitually in action, so we ought to be *habitually* prepared for action. To attain this end it is necessary to make preparation for such endeavours an object of habitual regard, and to allot to it a portion, both of our closet exercises, and of our constant watchfulness. We should aim at the same kind of preparation for habitual exertions as for specific ones; and then only should we be satisfied, when the fitness for them which may be attained by laborious discipline in the closet can be sustained through all the circumstances and employments of the day.

Such are the counsels, dear brethren, which I beg you to accept and to practise, in reference to preparation for the efforts which you make in order to turn sinners unto God. If the work of preparation should thus have acquired in your eyes a magnitude unusual and appalling, I can only beg you to ask whether it is unreasonable and unjust. Is it

more than the salvation of a soul deserves? Is it more than such a work, to be carried on by such an instrument, and in the midst of such difficulties, demands? Is it more than will be amply repaid? If it is more than you have been accustomed to make, this may not unnaturally account for your want both of wisdom, constancy, and success. You have complained much, perhaps, of these things; you have appeared to lament them; you have professed to wish that they could be remedied. Now I just ask you *how much* you wish it? Here are methods in which, if you were to exercise yourself in them, the evils you bewail might, in great part at least, be removed: will you employ them? Or will you, because it may be some trouble to make preparation, continue to go about these efforts for the good of souls as heedlessly as ever? In what earthly occupation should we obtain either credit or success, in preparation for which we did not take much more pains than we habitually take for this most important of all pursuits? Let us arouse ourselves from our supineness, and gird ourselves to this conflict as though we wished to be victors, and meant no longer to trifle with an effort which ought to engage every power, and all the resources, we possess.

LECTURE V.

HABITUAL ACTION.

“Lights in the world.”—*Philippians* ii. 15.

IN the illustration of Christian activity for the conversion of sinners to which our preceding discourses have been devoted, it has been my province to lead you to your closets, and engage you to exercises of stimulant meditation. I would fain hope—at whatever hazard, I must now take it for granted—that at my earnest entreaty you have been there, not merely contemplating the work to be done and realizing your means of performing it, but girding yourselves for the effort, and worthily resolving to commence it in the strength of the Lord your God. I have now, therefore, to

trace your steps from your hallowed solitudes into the thick and crowded world, and to imagine myself beholding you in your several spheres of domestic, social, or public life, accomplishing the purpose of your secret hours. You have taken your resolution; you have made your preparation; you are now coming into *action*.

The subject which stands for this evening is *Habitual Action*. Perhaps the very term startles you. It is impossible, you may be ready to say, that opportunity can be found for perpetually endeavouring to turn sinners unto God. Such efforts certainly must be confined to appropriate seasons; and to be always attempting them must be as great an error as entirely to overlook them. You may be disposed to add, that ordinary life is constituted of such an almost ceaseless succession of mixed and secular engagements, that suitable occasions for efforts of religious usefulness cannot be thickly scattered over its surface. I should hope, however, that you would be far from falling a victim to such a delusive imagination as this. Even admitting for the present, what we may hereafter find not to be true to anything like the extent to which it has been supposed, that opportunities of specific exertion are unfrequent, it is beyond question that there exists a wide and important scope for habitual action. Living and moving in the world as it now is, we are almost incessantly under the observation of irreligious persons. Some of them are for the most part found in our very habitations, among our children, our servants, or our friends; while it is obviously almost impossible to move beyond this limit, without mixing ourselves to an undefinable extent with the same portion of mankind. Now we have shown at large in a former discourse,* that the exemplary manifestation of Christian character has a direct and powerful adaptation to spiritual good: the whole sphere, therefore, in which our conduct is visible is also a sphere in which usefulness is attainable. In every part of it, and at every moment, we may be trying to do good by trying to be that which a Christian ought to be. This capability of general and perpetual usefulness is plainly indicated by the metaphor employed in the text. A lamp, indeed, may be, and no doubt often is, employed for the special benefit of

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some particular person or persons who may need its assistance; but, apart from such a circumstance, it is capable of an important general use, by being so fixed in a dark place as to give light to whatever passengers may come within the sphere of its rays. In like manner we are to conceive of Christians, who are "lights in the world," as not merely diffusing a beneficial influence occasionally, by special endeavour, but as doing so constantly, by the steady shining of a holy example, which is not, and cannot be, hid.

If it should be imagined that persons in general are not paying sufficient attention to our deportment to render it influential upon them, a moment's consideration will evince that the contrary is the fact. Not to dwell upon the undoubted adaptation of example to instruct and to convince, or upon the innumerable instances which have demonstrated its power, the fact is incontestable, that irreligious persons are in the habit of keeping a very shrewd watch on the conduct of professors. Our profession of being holier than they provokes it; and, however little it may be apparent while we are in company, it very often discovers itself by keen observations after we are gone, especially if anything has occurred to afford matter for depreciation, or for censure. Now, if it be true that the conduct of professors is strictly watched by the ungodly, this is the very state of mind fitted to receive the appeal which exemplary piety makes to the conscience. It creates a certainty that the influence of example will be felt, even apart from any opportunity of personal or pointed address. Here, then, is our scope for habitual exertion for the good of souls; a scope not at all less extensive than that through which our conduct is open to the observation of men.

Without repeating what I have said on a former occasion respecting the general importance of this department of labour, I shall now more particularly exhibit to you the manner in which it may be effectually occupied.

The means which may be brought into bearing for this purpose are chiefly two; *example*, and *conversation*.

1. With respect to *example*, there are several prominent aspects of it highly deserving of attention.

First may be noticed the *general spirit* of our deportment. Selfishness, vanity, pride, positivity, censoriousness, frivolity, artfulness, bitterness, envy, jealousy, and many other evils,

are the native fruit of a corrupt heart, and are largely produced in general society. Although we may now be Christians indeed, we also once walked after the course of this world, and shall find too much cause to confess remaining imperfection in one or other, if not in many, of these respects. If we wish to render our example influential to good, it should be our earnest care to detect and mortify these and similar evils. Humility, benevolence, candour, simplicity, and their kindred graces, should be cultivated by us with the most sedulous attention. A demeanour which shows no sentiment of self-importance, or desire of self-exaltation; a modest and unassuming address, a watchful and delicate regard, not only to the interests, but to the feelings, of others, to some extent in preference to our own; an unfeigned delight in others' welfare, and a prompt sympathy in their joys; a frank and open countenance which assumes no disguise, and lips which use no guile; together with a careful avoidance of unnecessary censure, and the common half-malicious gossip about other people's concerns, will not merely adorn our profession, but eminently tend to make our example winning and instructive.

We may next refer to the regulation of the *temper*. We all know how many things are perpetually occurring to try the temper, as well as how frequently it breaks forth in passion, if not into rage. In this respect a constitutional infirmity attaches to many persons which requires the more resolute guard. In few cases is more expected from a religious professor than in the control of his temper. Ill-governed passions invariably attach to us a strong censure, while effectual self-control gains for the most part a high encomium. And, if this is the case with society at large, it is more especially so in the domestic or other more limited circles, in which our conduct is more closely observed, and the influence of our temper more directly felt. A whole circle may be rendered happy or miserable according to the temper of almost any individual in it; so that it becomes not only a conspicuous indication of character, but a highly influential one. Vigorous attention, therefore, should be directed to this subject. In addition to an habitual meekness and gentleness of spirit, we should endeavour to be well guarded against occasional petulance and irritation. We should cultivate an ability to meet vexatious occurrences

without being betrayed into fretfulness, and to bear insults without passionate emotion. I need scarcely say that we should more especially resolve on being masters of ourselves in reference to those little things, those really groundless causes of irritation, from which, after all, many of the most violent bursts of passion arise.

To an amiable deportment and a well-regulated temper, should be added a *devotional* habit. I do not mean by this term such an absorption of mind in religious contemplation as either to withdraw us from, or to unfit us for, an attention to occupations of an earthly kind; if the mind of any person—it is by no means a frequent fault—were in such a state as this, it would undoubtedly be his duty to seek after a better regulation of it. But, without approaching to such an evil, it is obvious that, in the course of an ordinary life, our general habit and manner may be more or less devout. Religion may be used like the garments which are worn only upon special occasions; it should rather resemble those which are worn every day alike. Divine things may be treated with such evident neglect as to give any observer an impression that they hold no important place in our regard, and furnish none of our principal pleasures; and it is plain that such an impression must tend to confirm a disesteem of religion in the mind of the observer himself. If, on the contrary, we cultivate a manifest acknowledgment of God, a spirit of gratitude for his incessant bounties, a readiness to turn our thoughts and converse towards him on all suitable opportunities, as though religion were really our element and delight, our favourite companion, our perpetual help, and strength, and consolation—such an exhibition of character can hardly fail to produce a beneficial effect. It need not for a moment be supposed that such a habit would identify itself with an austere or gloomy temper. Far from it. However it might check levity, which, we suppose, will not be considered as an evil of *great* magnitude, it would inspire placidity, which is far more amiable; and it would tend to produce, what is always to be admired, the well-tempered union of gravity with cheerfulness.

It is highly important, further, to maintain the practical exhibition of *right principles* of action. The occasions are of continual occurrence which call for the exercise of integrity in various forms, whether of truth, fidelity to engage-

ments, or honesty, strictly and largely understood. What deficiencies in this direction are current among men of the world is too well known, and it is a direction in which they are particularly observant of professors of religion. I may add that in this respect professors are not likely peculiarly to excel. Practices of this sort are so blended with their interest in the most tangible forms, so enforced by former habit, and sanctioned by prevailing example, that the entire renunciation of them may be expected to require an effort. But the effort is demanded, and should be made. A shuffling, evasive, doublefaced manner of transacting business; a method of saying what you do not seriously mean, and of not doing what you have said; a habit of flying from your word, or failing in it; of taking an advantage where you can, and being strictly honest only when you cannot help it; these, and many such things, should be thrown to the utmost distance from the dealings of every Christian. A principle of high and unstained honour, a strict and unbending integrity, should be your invariable guide, and should not only be your guide in fact, but in appearance. Let every man be convinced that you are of most scrupulous integrity, that every transaction is not only straightforward, but transparent; that no pressure of adverse circumstances will lead you to an evasion, or a meanness: that he may trust you with property to any amount, and that your word is as valid as an oath, and as firm as your bond. It is not merely to the more considerable transactions of business that I apply this remark; it is capable of an important application to the very smallest, and to those who buy or borrow, as well as to those who sell. These are things which worldly people know must spring from the power of religion, and they will make our profession appeal to the heart.

In order to render our character exemplary, it will be further needful to bear in mind the *relations* in which we stand. These are obviously of great variety; and all of them have appropriate and congruous dispositions. The character can have no appearance of consistency if these dispositions are not cultivated. Consistency, indeed, lies much more in manifesting the dispositions which are *peculiarly* appropriate to us, than those which, however excellent in themselves, have no such distinguished propriety. If a man

be a parent, whatever may be his virtue in other respects, if he be a bad father, this one fault attaches to him a deep and indelible stain. It is the relations we bear which throw us out most prominently into public view, and hence the manner in which we fill them has a very large proportionate influence on the estimate and effect of our character. Every relation we sustain, therefore, is worthy of a separate study; nor should we be satisfied till we enter into the spirit of it, and excel in its appropriate graces. The husband and the wife respectively should strive to manifest the mutual affection, respect, subserviency, and support, as well as the relative subordination, which their union requires. Parents have to show a practical devotedness to their children's welfare, wisely regulated, alike in respect of indulgent fondness and fruitless severity. Children, likewise, have obligations of great peculiarity. In combination with the vivacity and aspirations of youth they have to cultivate a filial reverence for age, as well as a habit of ready submission to parental counsels, and affectionate concealment of parental failings. The circle which is occupied by brothers and sisters of the same family needs a strong guard upon the feelings of self-will, petulance, suspicion, and jealousy. In the station occupied by a master or a mistress, care should be taken to exercise authority, not only without oppression in substance, but without harshness in manner; to cherish a kind regard to the welfare of servants, as well as to exact their labour; and to show that we take no advantage of their inferiority of station to inflict either an injury on their rights, or a wound upon their feelings. With servants, on the other hand, it should be a particular endeavour to show all good fidelity; to identify themselves with the interest of their employer; not purloining; not answering again; not in idleness, disobedience, or wastefulness; not in talebearing, or violation of confidence; but by a steady course of kind, faithful, and willing service, to exemplify the spirit of their station. Without multiplying references further, let me now repeat, that the cultivation and exercise of these and other dispositions appropriate to our several stations is not merely of general importance, but is especially adapted to render our example useful to others. If we wish to hinder our own usefulness, we can scarcely do it more effectually than by some considerable defect in this direction. Be a tyrannical

father, a wilful child, a hard master, an impertinent servant, and the tendency of your example to do good will speedily be reduced to nothing.

Once more. We are all of us liable to be observed under *different aspects*, and we should take care to appear consistent in them all. We are to be seen not merely in the family, but often in the social circle, and sometimes in more public walks. All these changes require from us corresponding diversities of conduct, as they bring different phases of character into view, and put us to the test in different points. Care will be well bestowed in cultivating the fitness appropriate to every separate sphere, and the habitual watchfulness which may give unity and harmony to our appearance in them all. It will be a grievous thing if, with whatever propriety of behaviour in comparative privacy, we are unguarded and inconsistent in company; or if, with whatever seeming excellency abroad, we throw off restraint at home. Private, social, and public life, engagements religious and secular, should demonstrate us to be the same persons; actuated in all cases by the same principles, aiming at the same ends, and maintaining the same government of ourselves. I need not spend a moment in showing that such an example as this will be powerfully eloquent of the worth of piety. Be such as I have described, and you will deserve the appellation of "lights in the world."

2. The endeavours which may be thus habitually made for the conversion of sinners by the force of example, may be rendered considerably more influential by a well-directed *conversation*. The current of our words, indeed, is one principal method of exhibiting that of our feeling; and, so far as the tenour of conversation is simply illustrative of our character and principles, it may be considered as included in the observations already made. But, in the general intercourse of life, a further use may be made of the same instrument with a view to spiritual good. What I mean is, that current conversation, without any specific object or personal address, may be impregnated largely and influentially with instructive and beneficial matter.

I am by no means disposed to maintain that our conversation should always be religious, or to banish from social intercourse topics of public or private interest, or matters of business or politics, literature or science; but, without

approaching to such an extreme, or infringing in the least degree on the measure of attention which may justly be claimed for such subjects, it must be obvious, I conceive, that a much ampler leaven of useful tendency might be infused into conversation than ordinarily pervades it. Let us only recollect for a moment how the portions of time pass during which the course of conversation is quite at our own option. How much of them is occupied in speaking of the merest trifles, as the accidents of the weather or the wind; how much in an absolutely trivial chit-chat, furnished by the slightest incidents of the passing moment; how much in a sort of desperate effort to ward off an impending silence by saying something, though one has nothing to say; how much in retailing what one has seen or heard of others, *déservant* no better name than gossip, and very often a much worse; how much in little puns and witticisms, or strokes of satire, having no better object than merely to create a smile; how much in the narration of ludicrous stories, which are thought to answer admirably if they produce a hearty laugh; how much, in a word, in anything and everything but useful conversation! Or let us each call ourselves to account on the same score. Let us ask ourselves what efforts we have been in the habit of making to render conversation beneficial. When did we think of furnishing ourselves with useful matter, and cherish the purpose of introducing it whenever it might be practicable? When did we try to stem the current of trivial discourse, and turn it into a profitable channel? Perhaps, never. We may stand convicted of having invariably resigned ourselves to the stream, if we have not even augmented its force. Or, if we have done otherwise, it has surely been with less frequency and with far less vigour than would have afforded us satisfaction in the review.

Now, if these things be so, here is plainly an enlarged view of our scope for habitual exertion for spiritual good. We are perpetually conversing in the hearing of irreligious persons; and the topics to which a large portion of our conversation may be, not only unexceptionably, but most excellently directed, are precisely such as are adapted to their good. Probably much ignorance or want of information exists among them; perhaps much prejudice or misunderstanding; perhaps much perplexity or doubt; perhaps

much indecision or fear; perhaps much hostility to the truth. Weighty sentiments are not to be supposed to be inoperative when they are not connected with a personal and pointed address; they have always their appropriate power, and sometimes a great efficacy when presented in a cursory and general view. If, therefore, we really do wish to be useful, a line of operation for every hour, and almost every moment, is clearly marked out to us. Let us make it our study to charge our habitual conversation with beneficial matter; that it may resemble a stream whose current has run over beds of gold, and deposits the precious grains on the whole region through which it passes.

One material step towards the accomplishment of this design will be taken, if, after allowing due attention to lighter topics, we resolve to omit from our conversation everything which is not profitable. Such a resolution might impose upon us occasionally an unwelcome, and somewhat singular, taciturnity; but it is better to say nothing than to say what is useless. Besides, it is only by such a method, perhaps, that we shall discern how large a portion of conversation is open to the injection of better themes, and generate within ourselves an effectual impulse to the effort. While we allow ourselves to converse trivially, we shall make little progress in the art of conversing profitably. Let me recommend to you, therefore, the resolution, when you have nothing appropriate or useful to say, to say nothing. Make a determined excision from your discourse of all trivialities, witticisms, gossip, and jests. Give no indulgence to a vein of satire, or a sense of the ridiculous. Take no delight in setting a company in a roar of laughter. All such propensities are better mortified, and the very effort of mortifying them will do you good.

Your care should be directed, in the next place, to the filling up of the vacuum thus produced. Expelling the frivolous and ludicrous from your conversation, study to introduce instructive matter in its stead. It may seem difficult, but it will not be so in reality, if your own heart is well-regulated and near to God. Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh; and one grand source of the vanity of your discourse in times past you will find to have been the too prevalent vanity of your mind. If your mind be serious and solemnly impressed with divine things, you

will find little difficulty in giving conversation a useful turn. Serious topics will be the first that occur to you, and those of which it will be the most natural and easy to you to speak; while an abiding sense of their importance will provide an impulse sufficient to break through the little hindrances which may exist. In the first instance, therefore, be yourself serious; in the next, be thoughtful. Make it an object to have your mind stored with subjects of an interesting and beneficial kind; such as you may readily glean from the course of your own scriptural or other reading, or derive from the exercises of your own mind, or from observation of the world. Cultivate also a wise method of introducing them. Strive to sustain a useful conversation that has once been begun. Do not discourage yourself by an apprehended want of talent; such conversations never droop but for want of *courage*; and, if you have not always stores of knowledge to impart, you may often, by well-applied questions to other persons, open richer treasures than your own.

Having thus exhibited to you the principal means to be used in habitual exertion for spiritual good, I have a few remarks to add respecting the manner in which they should be employed.

In many cases endeavours of this class must be altogether general and indirect. In general company, of whom we know nothing, our concern can only be to maintain an example and a conversation as consistent and useful as, under the circumstances, they can possibly be made. In this method much good may be done. But there are many cases also in which, with a knowledge more or less extensive of those in whose presence we are, we may be able, without any personal address or pointed reference, to give both our example and our conversation an important and appropriate bearing. If we speak of the pleasures of religion, we may present them in one aspect to the young, in another to the aged; and, if we are aware that those who hear us are in distress, to them in a third. Before persons of amiable character and moral habits, we may speak of the necessity of an inward change; before persons of reckless profligacy, of the force of righteous obligation, or the solemnities of judgment to come; before those who are entering on life, of the necessity of guarding against its snares; and before those who are closing it, of the instruction to be derived from its

review. But the recital of cases would be endless; and it is needless; since it is manifest that conversation may, with great facility and effect, be directed to warn the thoughtless, to relieve the doubtful, to cheer the desponding, to quicken the sluggish, and to almost any other beneficial end which circumstances may present. Nor is it conversation alone which can be turned to this excellent account. Much may be done by mere example in the same way, by setting it studiously in opposition to evils we may wish to check, or by prominently exhibiting virtues we may wish to recommend. If you are with those who think religion melancholy, you may try more especially to show yourself happy; or, if you are with those who accuse professors of laxity, you may take the more pains to exhibit a delicacy of conscientious rectitude.

After these observations, dear brethren, I am not afraid that you will accuse me of not having presented to you a wide scope for habitual exertion for the good of souls: I am much more apprehensive that you may shrink from the magnitude and the constancy of the effort. You are saying, perhaps, "What an arduous undertaking! What perpetual labour! Is there to be no time of ease, no period of relaxation? To be *always* trying to do good!" I know, indeed, that the course I have recommended may interfere much with our habits of ease, and levity, and self-indulgence; that it may require strenuous efforts, and lead us into some difficulties. But why, after all, should I suspect you of making these complaints? I am to suppose myself addressing you, not as slothful Christians, but as *active* ones; resolved to waste none of your Master's goods, but to make full proof of your ministry. You are not inquiring how you may indulge yourselves, but how you may be faithful to your Lord. It is enough for you, therefore, to have shown you where and how labour is to be done for God. You are not the people to refuse, or to hesitate. It is not in vain that in retirement you have disciplined your hearts, and devoted your lives to the Saviour; you will go into the world, and you will live unto his praise.

Or, if you do hesitate, let me ask you why? If the service of God and saving the souls of men were a hated employ, an unwelcome drudgery, then I could imagine how too much of it might be disagreeable to you: but, upon this supposition, I

never should have wasted breath in exhorting you to it at all. I have been speaking all the while upon a supposition totally different—namely, that the service of God and the saving of souls were your delight, and among the very highest delights this world can afford you. If this be not true, correct me; if it be, rebuke yourselves. Of what worldly joy does a large measure fill you with so much aversion? If an effectual plan had been presented to you for turning every moment to the acquisition of wealth, would it have made you exclaim in equal melancholy, “Alas! to be all the day long acquiring riches”? Ought you not rather to esteem it a most happy circumstance that your whole life, including all its fleeting moments, may be applied with success to such a blessed and invaluable end? Would you really rather that efforts for the conversion of sinners were confined to the comparatively infrequent occasions on which they can be specifically made, and that the great mass of life, and all its fragments, should be consigned to an utter fruitlessness? If such a representation were to be made to you, would you not be ready to exclaim, “I hope not;” and to set yourself in action to try whether some part of life’s waste might not be reclaimed from such afflictive barrenness? You should rather rejoice that the whole of it is set before you as a fruitful field. Every moment you may be sowing for God: in the morning sow your seed, and in the evening hold not your hand.

Do you feel that it is difficult, that it is more than you shall be *able* to do? Be assured that the whole difficulty of it lies in the carnality of your own heart. Nothing considerable is to be referred to want of talent. Persons of the very smallest capacity and information have been eminent in this department. And so will any of you be who will *try*. Of course, it needs that the heart should be kept near to God, and deeply imbued with love to Christ; but this is nothing peculiar. This is necessary for other objects, and on other grounds; it is a primary matter of Christian duty, which may not on any account be neglected. And it requires nothing more than this, in order to keep up the continual aim, the observant watchfulness, the holy and grateful endeavour, of which I have been speaking. Clearly, therefore, you need not despair. You should rather resolve to be fit for anything for which consistent and eminent piety may fit you.

If, after all, I should fail in any case to engage the active resolution I desire, I only ask you, dear brethren, whether any of you will say that *you will not* aim at this improvement of life. Are you resolved to spend life idly, and to waste the powers which might be applied to such invaluable ends? Do not think to evade this question by attempting to leave the matter undecided, or in a state of suspense. Either you will, or you will not, thus labour for God; and you are this moment resolved upon the one or the other. If you are not determined for labour, you are determined against it; and all the pains you may take to hide this determination from your own eyes, only shows that you are conscious of a wrong you will neither acknowledge nor reform. Can you bear to remain in so hollow and suspicious a state of heart? Will not he that searcheth the heart estimate it aright, when he calls it a spirit of ingratitude and treachery? Reconciled rebel! Redeemed sinner! Flee from the remotest suspicion of such a crime, and, by all that is obligatory, grateful, or sincere, place yourself among the devoted band who are resolved to shine as "lights in the world."

If such be your aim, I may, perhaps, not unprofitably warn you that one of your greatest practical difficulties will be to maintain an habitual *remembrance* of your object. We are so much accustomed to be about our own business, and, on many occasions, are following it with such intense occupation of mind, that we too readily forget, not merely our obligation and design to do good to others, but almost the very fact that we are living in their sight. The prevalence of such forgetfulness will obviously be quite destructive of the end in view, and, as a matter of practical wisdom, everything should be done to correct it. With this view, make it a part of your morning exercises in retirement to impress upon yourself a vivid recollection of the fact, that you are about to spend a day in the presence of ungodly persons whose good your example and general conversation should promote. In addition to this, take such opportunities as the course of the day may afford you (and a moment is sufficient for the purpose) of recalling your attention to the same topic, and of casting your eye around you to observe who are spectators of your conduct, and what is the probable aspect of your conduct in their eyes. Such efforts as these may be a little troublesome, though scarcely so if your heart be right; but

they will be abundantly beneficial, and will go far towards rendering you in fact the light in a dark place which you desire to be. To remember this desire is almost the same thing as to fulfil it. The memory of it will serve, like the gunner's hand, to apply the spark to the materials which are already prepared to attest its power.

LECTURE VI.

SPECIFIC ACTION.

“I made haste and delayed not.”—*Psalm cxix. 60.*

SUPPOSING you to be prepared for action, dear brethren, it was my aim in the last Lecture to exhibit to you the methods of *habitual exertion* for the good of souls; methods by which you may at all times, and in all circumstances, pursue this important end, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. If, however, the spirit of the active Christian be within you, I may be sure that, with whatever diligence you make habitual efforts, you do not confine yourselves to them. You do not forget that you are surrounded by opportunities, more or less numerous and ample, of *direct and specific exertion* for the same end. Though you cannot be always communicating religious knowledge, you may be so *sometimes*; and, whatever may be the frequency with which such opportunities occur to you, a spirit of consistent dedication to your Lord will clearly lead you to improve them. I hope I may regard you as entering upon the duty of *specific*, as well as *habitual*, exertion for the conversion of sinners; and as prepared to receive with interest, and practically to apply, the observations to which the subject of the evening leads.

I need not stay to cast another glance at the various opportunities of direct religious instruction which may occur; but one of them, *family worship*, possesses so much peculiar interest and importance that I cannot refrain from making on it a few remarks.

I suppose, dear brethren, I may take it for granted that every pious man among you, and every pious woman also,

presiding over a household, maintains family worship. To suppose the contrary, would be to suppose a measure of sinful neglect and inconsistency in the highest degree afflictive. What I have now more particularly in view is the manner of conducting this exercise. Of course, you maintain the reading of the more instructive and profitable portions of the Holy Scriptures, and the united offering of serious and appropriate supplications. But I wish to recommend to you something further than this—namely, the practice of *addressing serious observations to your household when assembled at your family altar*. It is not necessary that this should be done invariably, allowance may be made for circumstances inducing and justifying an occasional omission. Nor need it be done at great length, a *few* observations, perhaps, being more conducive to usefulness in such an exercise than many. Neither is it indispensable that it should be of the nature of scriptural *exposition*, to which, perhaps, you might conceive yourselves incompetent; the very plainest observations of a serious kind being suited to the purpose, whether connected with the portion of Scripture which you have been reading, or not.

The circumstances of your household when assembled for worship afford, not only an unquestionable, but a most advantageous, opportunity for such an exercise. They are then withdrawn from their ordinary occupations of domestic service, their attention is expressly challenged to sacred subjects, and the whole habitation is, as far as practicable, reduced to a state of repose and quietness adapted to favour the exercise of beneficial reflection. The various members of the family are then especially gathered around you as its head, and more particularly as presiding over it in a religious view. By conducting the worship of the family you officiate as its priest; in reading the divine Word you become the mouth of God to them; and in supplication you become their mouth towards God: in these circumstances, therefore, what can be more fit than that you should speak out of the fulness of your heart, and press home upon these waiting auditors the great things of God? Is it not a scene pre-eminently inviting to such an effort, and, as it were, created on purpose for it? And, if this be omitted, does not the chief thing seem to be wanting, the beauty and crown, the life and soul, of the entire service? Here the whole influence of your

parental and magisterial relations would throw its weight into your instructions, since you would speak, not as the friend merely, but as the master and the parent. Your knowledge of individual character, and of the mental exercises, dangers, or necessities, of each, would give a most beneficial adaptation to your words, and enable you to address to each, by character, if not by name, encouragement or admonition of invaluable appropriateness; while the affection which your family bear you (and, if you fill your station like a Christian, this will not be small) will give additional weight to the words which fall from your lips, and make them sink, perhaps more deeply than any others, into the heart.

Now it is an established and admitted principle, that the existence of an opportunity for useful exertion creates an obligation to exertion. Every opportunity of doing good *ought* to be improved; so, therefore, ought this which has now been described. As a pious head of a family, you profess that you desire to be useful among them, and to wish, perhaps, either that you knew better how to be so, or that you had more opportunities of being so. But where have you been looking? Behold the opportunities immediately before you. If you have family worship twice in the day, which in the great majority of instances may be the case, here are at least seven hundred opportunities of usefulness to the souls of your household every year, of which, perhaps, you have hitherto made no improvement at all! Will you improve them from henceforth? Or do you mean to attach to your apparent anxiety the character of mere pretence, by neglecting so obvious a method of exertion?

You may probably hesitate under a sense of the difficulty of the exercise, and of your own incompetency. If I were urging you to anything which required a peculiar talent, I would admit the force of this objection; but it has really no foundation whatever. There is nothing frightful or overwhelming in your audience; an audience composed entirely of your children and servants, or other domesticated persons, with whom you are upon terms, not only of perfect familiarity, but of tender love. You are continually speaking to them with the utmost freedom upon innumerable other matters, and it is past belief that you can be incompetent to speak to them in a similar way about religion. What insuperable obstacle is there to your saying to them—"Dear

members of my household, who must soon be in eternity, and for whom I must soon give an account, how awfully important it is for you to seek the Lord! Are you seeking him? And, if you are not, will you not seek him while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near?"

I acknowledge, indeed, that you may find a difficulty, and perhaps a great one; but I am convinced that it will arise much more out of the state of your own heart, and your want of practice, than out of the nature of the exercise itself. As for the timidity and tremour which may arise from want of practice, it is perfectly childish to think of giving way to it. There are few things which we do not perform with some tremulousness the first time, but we know by multiplied experience that this inconvenience speedily vanishes. The obstruction arising from the state of the heart is of a more serious kind, but this also should, and may, be overcome. We do not feel deeply enough for the eternal welfare of our household! And how long is this sinful condition to endure? The remedy of it is obvious. Spend but five minutes every morning, before you enter your family circle, in realizing their spiritual condition, in stirring up yourself to care for their souls, in thinking what you may say for their good, and in beseeching God to make you a blessing to them, and I will venture to affirm that all your difficulties will vanish like chaff before the wind. Instead of finding it impossible to open your lips, you will find it impossible to close them.

But it is time that we should return to the general subject of this discourse, and to observations applicable to all those who may be engaging in specific endeavours for the salvation of souls. Accept from me, dear brethren, in your arduous and often perplexing work, a few remarks, first, on *the method you should pursue*, and, next, on *the dispositions you should exercise*.

I. In explaining to you *the method* you should pursue in your endeavours to turn a sinner to God, I may anticipate your glad attention; inasmuch as, amidst your various embarrassments, you may have often lamented that you knew not how to carry on, or even to begin, the work of religious instruction.

I suppose you, then, for the sake of rendering my counsels more distinct, to be entering into conversation with an

irreligious man for his conversion. Now I hope I need not here again enjoin what I have already pressed upon you,* namely, to aim *directly at his conversion*, and at nothing short of it; and to frame all your exhortations *in conformity with the Scriptures of truth*. I will rather enter into some detail of the process you should seek to accomplish.

1. Your first object should be to convey a *just knowledge of duty*. It is plain that this is the beginning of all valuable religious knowledge, and in all cases it is of admitted importance to begin at the beginning. Without doing so there is little prospect of a satisfactory progress. Apart from correct views of duty there can be no adequate, and scarcely any rational, conviction of sin; and apart from conviction of sin no due appreciation of salvation. Nor may it by any means be taken for granted that, upon so simple and elementary a subject, a sufficient degree of knowledge exists; upon the contrary, facts abundantly prove that men are as ignorant upon this point as they are upon any other; and, in truth, that this is the radical and fundamental ignorance which throws its baneful shadow over all other subjects of instruction. Nor is it ignorance alone which prevails in reference to the principles of human obligation and duty. Enmity shelters itself under cover of the darkness; and there is even a greater unwillingness to admit, than difficulty in perceiving, them.

As I have said, therefore, let your first object be to impart a just knowledge of duty. In this respect begin at the beginning, and show the person with whom you converse why, and on what ground, he is under obligation towards God. For this purpose you have to set before him the fact that God is his Maker, and to instruct him that out of his relation to God there arises an obligation to love him, or to treat him kindly. This phrase, *treating God kindly*, I purposely use as expressive of the love to God which is the primary duty of man. It is the love of benevolence, which, in other words, is kindness—exalting the idea of kindness towards God as much as you please by considerations drawn from his greatness and glory. You are thus prepared to show a sinner that his duty consists, not merely in avoiding outward wickedness, or in doing good works, but in *cherish-*

ing a right state of heart, namely, a uniform and prevalent kindness towards God, manifest in that care for his honour and concern to please him which are characteristic of such a state of mind.

If it should seem tedious to take this method, or be deemed that more rapid and effectual progress might be made by coming at once to charges of sin, or by immediately discoursing of the love and sufferings of the Lord Jesus, without depreciating these endeavours I may safely affirm that their success is very liable to be much more specious than real. A charge of sin to a man who does not know the ground of his obligation or the scope of his duty, if it be not altogether an unintelligible thing, may be an irritating rather than an humbling one; while the tears which you may cause to flow by details of the sufferings of Christ may have little connexion with moral emotions in one who has yet to learn his need of a Saviour. On the other hand, although you may advance with seeming slowness when your labour is directed to establish the first principles of moral science, every measure of progress that you actually gain is real and solid; of substantial value in itself, and fitted to be the foundation of an excellent and durable superstructure. In building a house, no man ultimately regrets the time or pains expended in laying a firm foundation. One of the principal reasons, perhaps, of the lamented instability of apparent converts, may be found in the defective manner in which these fundamental truths have been learned.

2. To a just knowledge of duty, you will, of course, be concerned to add a *deep conviction of sin*. The general necessity of this is obvious; since without it there can be no rational apprehension of danger, or of the need and value of salvation. Everything desirable in the subsequent exercises of the mind, or in the ultimate formation of character, will bear a proportion to the depth and extent of this important process.

Without insisting further, however, on the general necessity of producing adequate conviction of sin, it may be more material to point out the course which such efforts should take. And here it is principally important that you should effectually open to the person with whom you are conversing "*the plague of his own heart*." You may find it easy to adduce instances of outward sin; you may conceive it to be

the most obvious and effectual manner of bringing home the charge of actual guilt, and you may be more particularly tempted to act on this principle in cases of gross profligacy, where immoralities constitute the grand aspect of character: but in all cases, if you do not entirely avoid this method, you should lay on it very little stress. Make no use of the sins of drunkenness, lying, profanity, sabbath-breaking, or any other outward sin, but as an occasion of tracing up these acknowledged wrongs to the source of evil within the breast. If you do not exhibit and establish the fact that *the heart* is evil, that the indulged passions and cherished purposes of the soul are wrong, you do nothing towards the production of any valuable effect. A man who does not know and acknowledge this neither acknowledges nor knows his real criminality, and can never take his right stand before God. You should, therefore, be very particular in this respect; and press with earnestness and perseverance the instructions and illustrations by which this often strange, and always unwelcome, truth, may be fully manifested to the understanding and riveted on the conscience.

In this effort you will derive much assistance from the previous instruction I have recommended, as to the ground and nature of man's duty to God. What principally leads men to think that outward evils are their only sins, is the antecedent notion that outward righteousness is their only duty. If they are honest, and sober, and kind, and a few such things, they conceive that they fulfil all their duty; and hence, very naturally, when you attempt to convict them of sin, their ideas are confined to some breach of these obligations: but, if you succeed in making them understand that their duty to God lies in cherishing a *kind state of heart* towards him, your way is prepared for showing the existence of sin apart from outward conduct, and for demonstrating that inward source of iniquity to which all the streams are to be referred.

To those of you who have made any attempts to convict a sinner of wickedness of heart, I need not say that it is a conclusion which a thousand efforts are made to avoid. Innumerable pretexts, excuses, and evasions, are resorted to, in order to take off the edge of conviction, and to cover or extenuate what can no longer be denied. It is for you to observe and to follow all these shiftings, and to see that the

object of your compassion shall have "no cloke" for his sin. While a man contends that his heart is good, that he means well, that he wishes to be good, and would be so if he could, but that he cannot, or maintains any of the large class of fallacies akin to these, little or no progress is made in convincing him of sin. Whatever addition may have been made to his knowledge, no change is induced in the state of his heart; he retains all his pride, he cherishes every iniquity, he hastens to his ruin. However tedious or difficult it may be, therefore, to pursue the fugitive into successive, and apparently endless, subterfuges, and to fight battle after battle at successive points of defence, all the value you attach to his salvation urges you to persevere. Leave him to be the victim of any one of these fallacies, and he is undone.

You should remember, also, that when you have induced an acknowledgment of sin your work in this respect is not completed. It is indispensable to inspire *humiliation*. There is a vast capacity in fallen man of making an unfeeling acknowledgment of the most touching truths; and so you will find it with the fact of his own criminality. A sinner who may at length admit everything that you wish may yet continue obdurate and unaffected. If you examine into the reason of this, you will find that it is because he is thoughtless; because the fact of his criminality, though acknowledged, is not reflected upon, or contemplated in the light adapted to render it influential. It remains for you, therefore, to bring the acknowledged fact again and again before his eyes, and to press home upon him the various considerations by which the *evil* of sin may be exhibited. You have to speak of the justice and force of the obligation which is broken, of the wretchedness which is introduced into the heart, of the awful and endless displeasure of the almighty Judge; and, in addition to these topics, of the inestimable sacrifice which has been offered in expiation. The bearing of the last of these is of peculiar importance, inasmuch as it is pre-eminently adapted to melt the heart by the display of unutterable love. It sets home conviction without an aspect of severity. But, in order that it may produce this effect, it is necessary that it should be wisely and clearly put, and that the sufferings of Christ should be so associated with the just desert of our sins as to become to us the real measure of our own criminality.

3. Having proceeded thus far, your next object will be to induce a *right appreciation of the Saviour*.

Safe as it might be deemed, experience proves that it is not safe to assume that every person knows the general character, or even the name, of the Saviour of sinners; while it is certain that multitudes who are much less ignorant than this, have no correct ideas of the nature or design of his work. Besides this, there is ordinarily found, in connexion even with enlarged scriptural knowledge, an immediate and obstinate tendency to self-dependence and self-righteousness. No sooner are anxieties respecting salvation awakened, than relief is sought from purposes of amendment, from exercises of prayer, or from some similar source. Against this evil it is of the utmost importance to guard. These are but delusive hopes, but refuges of lies; and those who betake themselves to an insecure refuge are in as imminent peril as those who seek no refuge at all.

Now, in order to exhibit the Lord Jesus Christ to a sinner in his supreme and exclusive excellency, it is necessary to make strong and painful statements respecting the utter helplessness of his own condition. An awakened sinner finds his situation awful, and his feelings impel him, blindly, no doubt, *to do* something for its amelioration. In this effort he does himself no good, while he entirely overlooks the all-sufficient Saviour. Nothing can be more important, therefore, than the strongest and most direct statements that all such efforts are useless, and that no advance whatever is made towards acceptance with God by any amount, or by any continuance, of them.

Such a statement as this falls, and not altogether unnaturally, like something harsh and incredible upon a sinner's ear. He is ready to say, perhaps, "How hard is this! God is displeased with me for having done wrong; but he will not be pleased with me if I do right. Though I have been sinful in time past, I am now doing the very best I can, and surely I may expect a being so kind and merciful as God is to be satisfied with this: or, if he is not, what can I do more?" Now this language, though containing much error, contains also some truth. God *is* kind and merciful; sufficiently so, not merely to welcome to his friendship sinners who do the best they can, but sinners who do not; a truth which it is of the highest importance to maintain unques-

tionable. But if so, why may not a man who is striving to the utmost indulge hope of safety?

The only satisfactory method of meeting this question, is to exhibit with simplicity and clearness the truths relating to the *moral government of God*; to explain that God is not dealing with us simply as a father, but as a governor and a judge; and to show how a person who has to conduct affairs of government is required to impose a restraint on his private feelings, and to proceed undeviatingly in the administration of public justice. The fact of the Divine Being having instituted such a government being understood, and its justice and excellency perceived, a sinner will come to know where he stands, and to realize his condition as one of righteous helpless condemnation before the bar of God. He will be prepared to see that the soul that sinneth must die; to admit that for a convicted criminal there is necessary a righteousness better than his own; and to appreciate the occasion, the necessity, the adaptation, and the excellency, of the righteousness of Christ, together with the boundless love which has been exercised towards him in its provision.

It should be your endeavour to explain, also, by what method a sinner may secure to himself the benefit of the death of Christ. It is too commonly imagined that the death of Christ only makes way for the acceptance of what men do for their own salvation; and in many instances great perplexity exists as to the import of the terms *coming* to Christ, and *believing* on him. Make it your object to show that the benefit of Christ's death is to be secured *by submitting ourselves to his method of salvation*; by cherishing a state of mind breathing acquiescence in the provision of his grace; by giving ourselves up as guilty, helpless, and undone, to Christ Jesus, that *he* may be our wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

Still it is a question whether, after all this, the sinner whom you are instructing *may submit* himself to the righteousness of God. The probability is that he will long struggle against it; and that you will find it necessary to plead with him by various arguments of duty and of safety, of gratitude and of love, before he will rejoice your heart by adopting the language of an ancient Pharisee, "What things were gain to me, those I have counted loss for Christ."

4. To these remarks I may add, that you will find it of

great importance, in your endeavours to convert a sinner, to induce *a habit of meditation*.

The two objects that you wish to effect are the acquisition of knowledge, and the production of feeling. In any case an habitual thoughtlessness would be an almost insuperable barrier to your progress; but more especially so in this, in which the truths you have to communicate are unwelcome, and the whole heart is in arms against the impression you aim to produce. Now thoughtlessness upon religious subjects is the uniform characteristic of ungodly men, and has been found, to a most melancholy extent, to baffle the efforts which have been made for their conversion. This will be your grand enemy, and you will do well to wage war against it from the first by solemn injunction and earnest entreaty.

As thoughtlessness is a powerful adversary to your success, so a habit of meditation will be a most important ally. The quantity of attention paid to an object is one of the conditions which determine the effect it shall produce on the mind. Whatever is much dwelt upon is deeply influential, even though it be a trifle; and, if you can induce a frequent thoughtfulness of divine things, you secure for them a most valuable and proportionate power. Meditation after you have left may do much more than the whole course of your conversation. It brings truth home again and again to the heart, and, as by a process of digestion, incorporates it with the character. Truths thus taken up by a person's own thoughts begin to do their work, and enter into conflict with those antagonistic feelings which they are designed to overcome.

You will always find a person whom you can get *to think* making some progress. In your successive visits you will not observe him precisely at the same point. He will have something to say to you, or will be ready for you to say something to him. Having been exercised by reflection, his mind will be continually presenting some new aspect, which will be highly favourable to your work of instruction, and will give to your labour, not only a present charm, but a cheering prospect of success.

It is, perhaps, a yet more important reason why you should enforce a habit of meditation, that you have to enjoin upon the sinner with whom you converse the production of

a change in his own mind* (for such is the tenour of your exhortation when you urge him to turn to the Lord, or to flee to the Saviour), and reflection is the instrument by which this is to be accomplished. He has proud and other sinful feelings with which he is to contend; but with what weapon? Tell him that divine truth is his sword, and meditation the hand that must wield it. Tell him that his force for the transformation of his own heart lies in taking up the truths of God, and in making an intentional and vigorous application of them to his own case; that, with an evil heart to subdue, he is loudly called upon to use this method; and that, if he does not, his ruin is his own.

With these views, make it an importunate request to every person whom you wish to turn from the error of his ways that he will go into solitude for a portion of time, say half an hour, every day; and that he will spend it scrupulously in the consideration of what relates to his spiritual welfare, whether in the examination of his own heart, in the perusal of the Word of God, or in the recollection of instructions he may have received—always, be it understood, with direct application to his own case. If you succeed in this request, I do not hesitate to express my conviction that you have gained your great object, and that you will soon see conversion follow. Never was it known yet, that a man pursued a course of sin who for half an hour every day looked eternal things in the face; and the first instance of it that occurs will deserve to be recorded as nothing less than a miracle.

II. A brief space only now remains to notice *the dispositions* which your work will require to be in exercise.

1. The first of them is *resolution*. The necessity of this will arise partly from yourself. When the opportunity of action arrives, every inward impediment may come afresh into existence, or aggravate itself into greater force; so that, after all, if you are not resolute the work may not be done. The necessity of it may arise partly from others. You may find religion an unwelcome subject; or, if general conversation on it may be tolerated, a determination may be manifested to evade, or even to resent, any approach to a personal reference. Carefully avoiding everything which may be really

* See page 273 of this Volume.

unwise, you should be resolved to do what is right. Firmly carry out your conviction of duty, and fully discharge your conscience of its burden. A sick child may refuse medicine, and a person in imminent danger may scorn help, but you do not yield to the petulance of either the one or the other; how much less ought you to suffer an effort to be repelled which aims at the prevention of spiritual and eternal woes!

2. To resolution add *promptness*. Time is always flying, and opportunities of usefulness, when they arrive, instantly begin to take their departure too. They should, therefore, be embraced immediately. How often may we linger, unwilling to begin the effort, until a large portion, or perhaps the whole, of the time which might have been usefully employed is gone! We should be quickened by the consideration that opportunities, when they are gone, *never return*; whatsoever therefore our hands find to do, let us do it with our might.

3. Your endeavours will require the exercise of *watchfulness*. Ever-varying circumstances will demand an ever-observant eye. At the outset you may find reason to postpone your intended effort to another opportunity; or, as you proceed, you may discover the operation of some cause rendering it desirable that you should desist. The effect of your conversation may need to be watched. Perhaps it may irritate; or the drift of it may be misapprehended; or some new aspect of character may appear calling for a change of address; or you may discern a beneficial influence affording you great encouragement to proceed. All such things as these are important, and the prompt notice and the skilful use of them may be very closely connected with your success. The object you have in view is awfully delicate, and your endeavour should be conducted throughout with a trembling care lest your own hand should mar your design, and destroy your hope.

4. Another disposition indispensable in your labour of love is *patience*. You must not expect to accomplish everything in a moment, or to carry the heart of an enemy to God by storm. A state of ignorance, prejudice, and sinful passion, presents many difficulties in the way of its own cure; and we may be very thankful if we accomplish it even by slow degrees. Truths which appear to us with the utmost plainness, or the most decisive evidence, may be very doubtful or obscure to those with whom we converse; and feelings

which have so long been excited and moulded by worldly or sinful objects, may but very gradually yield to the influence of the most powerful transforming considerations. Continued ignorance and obduracy under our most sedulous instructions should be treated, not with anger or severity, but with the utmost gentleness and pity; lest any manifestation of impatience upon our part should obstruct our access to the understanding and the heart, and forfeit the love and confidence in which the chief power of a teacher consists.

5. In fine, your efforts should be made with *perseverance*. Whatever may be their want of success, never abandon them so long as the opportunity of making them remains. You may have many temptations to do so. One may show so much resentment, another so much stupidity, and a third so much inconstancy, that you may be ready to say, "Everything practicable has been done for these people; it is of no use to pursue them farther." But let a recollection of the immense value of their salvation check the influence of such a sentiment. If you do abandon them it is to everlasting ruin. And can you do this? What! while life and hope remain? While God abandons them not, but prolongs the opportunity of repentance? All that is compassionate forbid! In various known instances persevering instruction has been effectual after many years of resistance, and, for aught you know, at the very moment of your despair success may be about to be vouchsafed to you. Under all circumstances be steadfast and unmovable; and, till a sinner is in hell, omit no effort to prevent his fall.

Such, dear brethren, are the counsels I commend to you for your assistance in your labour; let me only hope that you will combine diligence with wisdom, and act in the spirit of the psalmist, when he said, "I made haste, and delayed not."

LECTURE VII.

TREATMENT OF VARIOUS CASES.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.”—*Psalms* xix. 7, 8.

It might have been expected that, as all men are involved in a common ruin, and are the subjects of a common depravity, so the method to be pursued in endeavouring to turn them unto God would be one and uniform. If, however, even to a small extent, you have made such endeavours, you have doubtless found that the one wickedness of mankind exhibits itself in many aspects, and gives rise to cases of so great variety, as to defy the application of a common method. These cases are often as new and diverse, in comparison with each other, as though they arose from different and even opposite causes; and the occurrence of them in your own practice has, perhaps, convinced you that, for their effectual treatment, they require no inconsiderable variety of knowledge and skill.

This variety of skill and knowledge, allow me to say, dear brethren, it is highly important you should attain. It is so, at least, if it is important that you should have any success in your work; because an unfitness to treat particular cases is plainly adapted, not merely to impede, but to obstruct it altogether. If a sinner arrives at a point of ignorance, or mistake, or obduracy, at which you do not know what to do with him, it is clear that all hope of your being useful to him is at an end. I am prepared to hear you say that, though important, this eminent skilfulness is not easy, and I grant it; but what matter connected with our own welfare do we abandon because it is not *easy*? We pursue every object so far as it is *practicable*. Now it is unquestionably practicable to qualify ourselves for the proper treatment of all forms of human depravity. The Word of God, the instrument we have to employ, is perfectly fitted for its work; and is also able to render the man of God “perfect, thoroughly prepared” for his labour. Our deficiencies in

action result from previous deficiencies in the accurate knowledge and just application of divine truth. Our small utility as soldiers under the Captain of salvation arises, in great part, from our having bestowed little pains on acquiring the use of our weapon; the remedy of which evil is evidently necessary, and will as evidently be availing to the efficiency of our services.

The subject is as extensive as it is important. All that I can do on the present occasion is to drop a few hints on some of the cases which most frequently arise, as aids to your further reflection. We may contemplate them *as they indicate the state either of the understanding, or of the heart.*

I.—1. As referring to the state of the understanding, the first case we notice is that of *deep ignorance*. In many cases it may appear that your conversation, although you have conceived it to be simple, is not sufficiently so for the person whose good you seek. It takes for granted too much previous knowledge. And as, if you had been trying to make a child read who had not learned the letters, you would abandon the lesson and have recourse to the alphabet, so in these cases you should fall back on the most simple portions, the alphabet, of religious truth.

As to the instances of *extreme* ignorance which sometimes occur, and which would be scarcely credible if they were not substantiated by unquestionable testimony, it is by no means to be concluded that any of them, even the most desperate, are beyond effectual instruction. However slender the capacity may be by nature, or however deteriorated by the want of early instruction, if the mind be sane there is hope. God has fitted truth to the mind and the mind to truth, and we may rely with perfect confidence on the wisdom and sufficiency of this adaptation. Our object should be to arrive at the simplest and most elementary forms of truth, by reducing our own knowledge to its rudiments, and by searching the Scriptures for the most apt illustrations. The comparison which, with the greatest facility, exhibits the nature and consequences of our relation to God (the fundamental principles of moral truth), and which the Scriptures often employ, is drawn from the parental character. "If I be a father, where is mine honour?" Every sane man can understand that children ought to love their parents; and every one who can understand this is capable of receiving all the

truths which relate to his duty to God, and to his sin and misery, and, therefore, those which relate to his salvation.

2. Another case of frequent occurrence is that of *unmeaning acquiescence*. Those with whom you converse, perhaps, instantly express their agreement in everything you say, but in such a manner as to leave a painful conviction that they neither understand nor attempt to understand it. These are exceedingly tiresome cases, and apparently almost desperate. The real source of this empty assent is probably to be found in a desire to escape the trouble of any exercise of mind on religious subjects. They agree to everything that they may not have the fatigue of thinking of anything; it is the most effectual way of keeping their minds quiet, and of sending you away, at the same time, satisfied with your visit. The method of treating this case is not so much by instruction as by motive. You have not so much to teach them that which they do not know, as to press upon them that which they do know. The deep sleep of the heart paralyzes the understanding; it is your business to disturb it. For this purpose, make the strongest possible appeals to the passions, so as your appeals are grounded upon admitted truths. Strive to your utmost to touch the feelings. Do all that can be done to awaken hope, fear, grief, shame, or any other powerful passion, it scarcely matters which; for, when any one comes into strong action, the understanding will begin to act, and the whole soul will be open to you at once. In such cases as these you should be particularly studious to bring out the whole pungency of divine truth, which cannot be supposed to be greater than it may be necessary and fit to employ. Do not shrink from adducing whatever in Holy Writ is most melting or most terrific; and, without asperity, adopt a manner of address as solemn and subduing as you may be able to assume.

3. The third case we notice is that of *tenacious mistake*. It occurs when persons hold errors as unquestionable truths. Some, for example, are perfectly convinced that they were made Christians in their baptism; others, that if they lead a good life they can be in no danger; and others, that, however they may be called upon, they really *cannot* do anything that they ought. The influence of such mistakes is plainly very mischievous. They not only negative some important portions of truth, but they facilitate the evasion and neglect

of all the rest. They exert an influence the more pernicious, because they are held, not as truths merely, but as parts of religious truth; so that, in endeavouring to show their fallacy, you seem to be undermining their very faith itself.

Now, I do not mean to say that such persons cannot be converted without a special conviction of these errors, nor that your whole efforts should be directed to such an object; yet I conceive it important that they should not be overlooked. If they can be destroyed, a great obstacle is removed out of the way, and success very much facilitated; and there is no reason to despair of the attempt. It is important, however, to remember how this attempt should be made. We should keep at the utmost distance from bitterness or censure; we should never laugh at people for their ignorance, or even accuse them of it; we should never oppose error by mere assertion or positivity. Our endeavour should be to induce thought and examination; to open avenues of reflection, and furnish materials for it; to exhibit clear, solid, and convincing arguments, with great coolness, with no aim at triumph, and leaving them for consideration in order to produce their full effect. It is of great importance, in such cases as these, to induce a habit of *independent* thinking; independent alike of others and of themselves. When you can induce a person to feel that he is not to hold an opinion because he has always held it, or because other people maintain it, or because it has been inculcated upon him by his religious teachers, or for any other reason but *because it is true*, you loosen some of the grand roots of the tree of error, and may the sooner expect to see it fall.

4. The last case we mention under this head is that of *sophistical entanglement*. Many persons are, or profess to be, embarrassed with difficulties on various points; these become the topics of almost every conversation, and little progress seems to be practicable in the production of spiritual good, unless they can be silenced or removed.

Some cases of this class exhibit great tenderness of conscience and anxiety of mind; the embarrassment is plainly real and not feigned, and the exercises resulting from it, perhaps, extremely painful. These persons should be treated with great gentleness. You should hear all that they wish to say, since the very utterance of it may relieve a burdened

heart. Enter into every perplexity, and, however clear the point may be to you, spare neither time nor pains in the kindest manner to render it so to them. Bear compassionately with their weakness; and go over the same ground with them again and again, if necessary, endeavouring not to evade, but really to *meet* every difficulty, and to treat each subject in a manner that *ought* to be satisfactory. Combine prayer with your converse; since nothing tends more to lead the understanding to rest than a devout and a tranquil heart.

Cases of perplexity, however, are, for the most part, of a different kind. You meet with doubts and objections in far greater number among persons who evidently amuse themselves with them, and make them an occasion of trifling with you. It requires some wisdom and resolution to deal with such people as these. If you will suffer them to direct the conversation, they will lead you, perhaps, through the whole region of controversy, touching upon one subject after another so rapidly as to allow of the effective consideration of none. Such trifling as this should be cut short. You will do well, in the first place, to limit the discourse to *difficulties actually felt by the person with whom you converse*. It plainly can be of no importance at all to converse with him upon any other; yet you may often find, when a doubtful point is started, that it is merely for the sake of conversation, and that no embarrassment respecting it actually exists. All such topics discard. You will find it an advantage, secondly, to refuse to answer *objections to the sentiments of other persons*. You will commonly have much of this sort of work provided for you; something has been found in such a book, or said by such a minister, or held by such a professor, against which heavy objections may be brought. But you are not bound to answer those objections. It will be much better for you to be prepared with your own representation of truth, for which alone, of course, you can be held accountable. Whatever objections may be brought against this you will be expected, and you should be able, to repel; but you may thus secure the opportunity of making a representation not liable to *some*, perhaps not liable to *any*, of the objections with which your antagonist meant you should have to contend. Your advantage in this respect is still greater, if your study of the Word of God should have led you into views of truth so modified as to avoid *all* the objections of the

infidel, and as to extort the confession, "If things are so they are perfectly reasonable, and liable to no complaint." One may tell you, perhaps, that he commonly hears a very different account; but hold yourself quite independent of other men's opinions, that you may link yourself with no man's errors. Let your only question be, Are not these views true? Thirdly, it is important to press upon every such person *a faithful regard to admitted truths*. No man will say that everything is false; *something*, at all events, is true, and is acknowledged to be true by himself. But every moral truth is adapted to exercise a practical influence to which it is obligatory to yield. If a person acknowledges only that God is his Maker, out of this truth arises an obligation to love his Maker which it is imperative on him to fulfil. Press this obligation home. That some truths are enveloped in darkness is no reason why those should be neglected which shine as in a blaze of light. Whatever may be said as to doubtful points, resistance to admitted truths is clearly wrong. If you press this successfully, you gain everything. The heart which yields to one truth will speedily discover more. Finally, make it your endeavour to *produce seriousness*. You will scarcely fail to discover evidences of prevailing levity; and, without settling any controverted point, you will be able to show that topics which involve such awful issues as belong to life, death, and eternity, ought not to be treated with levity. In such an exhortation, if you yourself are serious, every man's conscience will be your ally; and, if you succeed in inducing seriousness, you do much to facilitate the exercise of beneficial consideration.

II.—I. Among the cases which may be referred to the state of the heart may be ranked, in the first place, *fallacious confidence*. You meet, doubtless, with many persons well satisfied with their state upon grounds which afford no satisfaction to you; so very well satisfied, indeed, that it is a matter of no small difficulty to induce even an inquiry on the subject. Now, it cannot admit of a doubt that every means should be employed to break up such a ruinous confidence. While it continues, it is obvious that no progress whatever can be made in saving knowledge. It shields the heart from everything which may be adapted to pierce it, and inevitably frustrates every attempt at conversion. It is

of the first importance, therefore, that this obstacle should be removed. To leave it in existence is to abandon the sinner to his ruin.

As to the question *how* this should be attempted, I readily answer that it should be done in the gentlest way possible. It is at the very best a painful work, both to him who performs it and to him for whose sake it is performed ; and, as in a surgical operation, any unnecessary severity may well be spared. But, if gentle measures do not prevail, undoubtedly, more powerful ones should be resorted to. If hints and insinuations are sufficient, by all means let a deceived sinner learn his misery by means of them ; but, if they are not so, let it be declared to him in the broadest and plainest terms. Even hesitation in this respect is treachery to the soul's welfare, and, instead of being commended as tenderness, ought to be condemned as cruelty. There is no interest but that of the soul that we should treat in such a ruinous manner. If a person's house were in flames, would any one hesitate to say to him, If you do not escape you will be burnt ? And why should we feel so much less deeply for men's souls, as to shrink from telling them in direct terms, if we can show them scriptural grounds for it, that they are in the way to hell ? All that is really compassionate forbids such treacherous tenderness, whatever may be the immediate, or apprehended, results of a bolder and more faithful course.

2. There are cases, secondly, of *intentional deceit*. People with whom you converse not unnaturally wish to stand well in your eyes, and they frequently give a better account of themselves than truth would warrant. Sometimes this extends only to a disclaimer of grosser faults ; at others a cloak of religion is assumed, in part, perhaps, for the sake of expected charity. I have known instances of this kind of deliberate imposition, even upon the very verge of eternity. That it is of the utmost importance to make your way to the heart and conscience of such persons admits of no doubt ; and, though it may be difficult, much may be done towards it by searching conversation, and by collateral inquiry. Whether any benefit may arise from intimating your suspicions, or from bringing forward your evidence, of their hypocrisy, is doubtful, and must be decided by your own discretion in each particular case. But one method is of undoubted propriety and suitableness. It is to trace iniquity

to the heart, and endeavour to lead to its detection there. We are, perhaps, apt to lay too much stress upon outward sins in our efforts to produce conviction ; and though I do not say that they should be wholly unnoticed, yet it is far more important to lead a sinner to a just knowledge of his own heart than to convict him merely of external guilt. Let any one who wishes, however falsely, to disavow charges of open sin, have the full benefit of such a disavowal. Say that it is of no consequence whether he is, or is not, guilty of the wickedness he disclaims ; that, if he be innocent of it, he is still corrupt at heart, and an enemy to God ; that this is his great iniquity, and that which equally ensures his destruction. No fraud can be practised upon you in reference to this charge. If he pretends to deny it, the Book of God is at once your authority and your proof ; if he falls under it, your object is attained.

3. You may meet with many cases of *ill-directed effort*. Where you have so far succeeded as to awaken anxiety, or where, in the first instance, you may have found a measure of it to exist, you may nevertheless discover that the endeavours to which it leads are altogether of an unsatisfactory kind. Some you may find betaking themselves to a diligent keeping to their church ; some to leading a better life ; some to regular attendance at a place of worship ; some to reading and prayer, and religious associations.

Now, some of these things are most excellent in themselves, and may be regarded as pleasing and hopeful indications of commencing piety ; but we should take great care to encourage no satisfaction, either in ourselves or in others, in that which, after all, is not of a saving character. A broad and decisive distinction requires to be drawn between things which are good in themselves, and things which have an adaptation to rescue a sinner from sin and misery. Nothing, for example, can be more excellent than holiness ; yet the condition of a sinner is such that, if he were to be henceforth as holy as an angel, he would gain nothing as to deliverance from condemnation. For this purpose there is required an atonement for sin, which God has provided in the death of his Son ; and *submission to that atonement* on the part of a sinner is the only method whereby the benefit of it can be derived to him. It should be carefully observed by us whether this state of mind is, or is not, induced. If it be,

everything is well ; if it be not, everything is wrong. It may be conjoined with any or all of the pleasing appearances above noticed ; but, on the other hand, any or all of these may be separated from it. It is not certain that a sinner has submitted to God because he is thus hopefully exercised ; he may have done so, or he may not.

None of these pleasing appearances exercise a more plausible and delusive influence than prayer. To a very great extent a notion prevails that sinners may be saved by prayer ; and there is something so excellent in prayer itself, and, considered as a spiritual exercise, so much identified with the existence of sincere piety, that many pious persons have either imbibed the same sentiment, or are startled at the opposite. To me it appears to be one of the simplest and most obvious truths, that no man can be saved by prayer. If it be a spiritual exercise (which is far from being always the case), it may be, like holiness, an *evidence* of salvation, but not the *instrument* of it. It is not that which a sinner is to do in order to be saved, or that by which he can be saved. It does nothing towards his salvation, but leaves the question of acceptance or wrath just where it was. Now, even if prayer might always be taken as an evidence of piety, it would be an unscriptural and mischievous thing to confound the *evidences* with the *method* of salvation. But, as I have just hinted, prayer is by no means uniformly a spiritual exercise. Much of it is formal, and much that is not formal is natural—the utterance of an awakened, but not of a subdued, heart. This is even no evidence of piety ; and yet it is the prayer by which multitudes hope to be saved. It is not only a truth, therefore, but a very important truth, that a sinner cannot be saved by prayer ; that, if this prayer be unaccompanied with submission to God, it leaves him under condemnation ; that, if it be accompanied with submission to God, it is not prayer that saves him, but submission ; and that reliance placed upon prayer serves only to blind him to his condition, and to render prayer itself an instrument of his ruin.

It is the more material that prayer should be set in its true light, because by many persons it is regarded, not merely as that which will save them, but as the only thing which it is either requisite or possible for them to do in reference to their salvation. “If prayer does not answer the end,” they

are ready to say, "what can we do more?" And, as it uniformly happens that prayer does not answer an end for which it is unscripturally and inappropriately used, it hence follows that they conclude they have nothing else to do, and make themselves satisfied in a state of sin and condemnation; as though they would say, "I have prayed to God, and that is everything; and now, if I am not converted and saved, it is not my fault." It is evident that, in such a state of mind, the attention of a sinner is withdrawn from all scriptural views of duty, and from every impulse to right action. The Scripture speaks of humbling ourselves before God, of repentance, of godly sorrow, of submission to Christ's righteousness; all which are thus, most unjustly and injuriously, superseded by prayer, an exercise by the performance of which, in whatever manner, a sinner deems himself exonerated from all obligation to these scriptural and essential duties. Instead of being useful, the very exercise of prayer becomes in this method a tremendous mischief. I do not here need to be told of the fallen and helpless state of human nature, or of the thousand encouragements to prayer which are contained in the divine Word; admitting these most readily, I must maintain also that it is a sinner's *direct and immediate* duty to turn to God, and submit to his Son,—a duty from the obligation and necessity of which not a whole century of prayers could relieve him. Make it your business, dear brethren, to see that no person under your instruction shall ruin himself by this melancholy delusion.

If you find reason to think that, amidst whatever hopeful exercises, the heart is not bowed to the righteousness of Christ, you should not only indulge no satisfaction yourself, but you should allow none to exist in the mind of those whose conversion you seek. It may be a very hard lesson for them to learn, and not a little painful for you to inculcate it; but it is of indispensable necessity for you to say that, notwithstanding all their goodness, they are as truly in the way to hell as ever. Such an annunciation may be received with grief, with surprise, with resentment; but, however modified in language or in manner, substantially it is indispensable. Of course, you will endeavour to make it clear by scriptural instruction and proof; which, if you can gain attention, you may readily effect by a review of the condi-

tion into which sin has brought us. You should be prepared, also, for the question which you may instantly expect: "What, then, am I to do?" Be ready with your answer—"Submit yourself to God's righteousness." Show the righteousness which God has provided in its just attitude, and in its blessed adaptation to our need; and press the obligation and necessity, as well as the privilege, of counting all things but loss in order to win Christ, and be found in him.

4. You may find instances of *cherished neglect*. There may be some who will allow you to converse with them, who, nevertheless, have no intention of paying any regard to your instructions, but who both cherish and avow a contrary purpose. These are persons plainly to be pursued with the force of motive. Everything that is solemn in manner, and weighty in sentiment, should be brought to bear on them. Sometimes appeals of melting compassion derived from the love of God, sometimes of awful terror drawn from his wrath. But perhaps the topics from which the most salutary influence may be expected are these. In the first place, a well-sustained charge of criminality. Endeavour to show such a person that, in purposely disregarding eternal things, he does what is wrong in itself, and what his own conscience condemns. Intentional neglect is a state of mind which, however he may wish to cherish it, he will never pretend to justify; and, if you succeed in making his conscience speak, in awakening a fixed sense of criminality and self-reproof, you effect, perhaps, the most hopeful step towards a change. In the next place, endeavour to induce a conviction that he is rushing on his own ruin. Disabuse him of the notion that he is born for destruction; that he is the victim of irreversible fate; that he is to be borne down by irresistible wrath. Make him know that his destiny is in his own hands; that life and death are exhibited for himself to determine which shall be his portion; that all things are ready for his blessedness; that he is endowed with capacities for securing it, and that, if he falls into hell, the act of destruction is his own—and you thus impart views from which much benefit may be derived.

5. You may sometimes incur *direct resentment*. Smothered resentment may often exist; but it may occasionally break out into open, and perhaps into violent, expression. Perhaps you may be required to leave the habitation; perhaps, forbidden to enter it again.

In such cases it may occur to you that you must have done something wrong, and have failed of the proper manner of conveying instruction. Doubtless you may have done so, and it is important for you to make the inquiry; but this conclusion by no means necessarily arises from the facts. Resentment in the hearer may arise without any fault in the speaker, as is manifest, not only in the case of Stephen, whose auditors gnashed upon him with their teeth, but in the history of our Lord, from whose preaching a similar result not unfrequently followed. Without shrinking from a thorough self-examination on the subject, therefore, you may yet cherish a hope of having done nothing to deserve either your own reproofs, or those which may be lavishly cast upon you.

In the same way you may dispose of another suggestion which may arise in such circumstances, namely, that, having produced resentment, you can have done no good. I am not about to plead for the desirableness of inducing resentment; I readily allow that endeavours should be made to avoid it, if possible; but, if it should arise, I should be very far from being discouraged by it. I can by no means take it as a sign that no good is done, or is likely to be done. I look at it, indeed, altogether in a contrary light. It is precisely the effect which divine truth is adapted to produce on the conscience while the heart resists it; and it is an evidence that, though truth has not reached the one, it has reached the other, and given testimony to its power. Nor does resentment, when it is without just cause, obstruct the avenue to the heart. It is very much adapted to give rise to subsequent consideration and regret, and, being found causeless, to induce a more studious expression of kindness in future interviews. Such, in fact, has often been the case; and we are quite justified in saying, that it is much better and more hopeful for instruction to produce resentment than to produce no effect at all. The most afflictive of all conditions is an unbroken apathy.

You should be on your guard, likewise, against imagining that, where you have been so unhappy as to inspire resentment, it is useless for you to attempt anything further, or that it is better to do nothing if you cannot act without provoking a similar feeling. Both these ideas are erroneous. All you have to do is to see to it that resentment is inspired,

not by yourself, but by the truth ; and that, while pressing home the most unwelcome topics, you preserve an evident and unquestionable aspect of benevolence. With these cautions you may and must persevere. Too much is staked upon the issue to allow you to abandon the effort, and too many rewards have been given to unwearied kindness to allow you to despair of success.

I am very well aware that the observations which I have made are much fewer and more brief than is demanded by the subject to which they refer. I commend them, however, to your serious and candid consideration ; and, in closing, only press upon you again the sentiment that you ought to be prepared for every case which may arise. If you find that you are not so, do not, under any pretext, rest satisfied with your deficiency. Observe carefully how much want of success in your labour arises from your unskilfulness in contending with its difficulties ; and bring home to your heart the fact, that various persons are perishing in their sins because you do not know how to relieve the difficulties of one, to answer the objections of another, or to reach the conscience of a third. Ought not such a state of things to be deeply painful to you ? And more especially while there are means of remedying the mischief ? There is no fault in your weapon. There is no aspect of human depravity or wickedness to which the Word of God is not adapted. It is like an armoury, comprehending weapons of every class, and suited to warfare of every kind. Have you studied it closely ? Have you felt its application to the varied workings of your own heart ? Are you habitually engaged in bringing it home to your own bosom, so as to learn the method of applying it to others ? Are you abandoning yourselves to a variety of theological difficulties, without knowing your own way out of the labyrinth from which you have undertaken to extricate the perplexed ? Do you find that the doctrinal views you entertain are not adapted for the work of converting sinners ; that they have either no edge, or one that is easily and effectually turned aside ? How long do you mean to remain in such a condition, so grievously disqualified for the prosecution of the most important of all labours ? When will sinners be converted, if the war against their iniquities does not assume a different character from this ? Is this feebleness of our array entailed upon us by the Captain of

the host? Or is it not the result of our own ignorance and inattention? Dear brethren, as workmen in this blessed employ, let me entreat you to be workmen who need not to be ashamed. Gird yourselves with the complete armour which God has provided; an armour not less complete for conquering others than for defending ourselves. Scriptural study, reflection, and prayer, will accomplish the object. Let me hope that you will earnestly pursue it, and give yourselves no rest until you have proved how fully the truth of God is adapted to all the aspects of the wickedness of man, as the provision of his mercy is to the entire depth of his ruin.

LECTURE VIII.

DIRECT EXERCISES AFTER LABOUR.

“O Lord, I beseech thee send now prosperity.”—*Psalms* cxviii. 25.

I AM now to suppose, dear brethren (and I hope that with some truth I may do so), that you have been making actual endeavours for the conversion of sinners; that you have gone forth to instruct the ignorant, to warn the thoughtless, to reprove the wicked, and to beseech God's enemies to be reconciled to him. Your labour is now done: but did you drop all remembrance of it with the actual termination of your toil? I trust not; but that it has still a place in your recollection, and that it has been associated with your subsequent approaches to God.

As, in some foregoing discourses, I have pressed upon you the importance of preparatory devotional exercises, I must here add that similar exercises are no less important now your labour is performed. If you have felt the propriety of them in the former circumstances, and more especially if you have reduced them to practice, I have no doubt but you will acknowledge the value of them in the present. The sacred exercises which should follow our endeavours for the salvation of our fellow-men are closely connected with those which precede them; I might say they grow out of them. There

is no man who enters his closet before he makes such endeavours, but will long to return thither afterwards.

The exercises now contemplated will naturally have respect to two principal objects. They may relate to ourselves, or to others ; to the success of our exertions with men, or their acceptance with God. It might most nearly accord with our feelings, perhaps, if I were first to notice the exercises connected with the *success* of our endeavours, since this is probably with us a very prominent, if not the most prominent, object ; but I turn rather, in the first place, to the *acceptance* of our services before God, which ought, in truth, to be a prior concern.

I. If our endeavours for the conversion of sinners are rightly made, they are made as acts of obedience and service to God, and as expressions of grateful love and dedication to his glory ; and, if so, then our first business obviously is to carry the services when rendered into his presence, and lay them at his feet. Such an exercise naturally arises out of the primary intention of the service itself ; that intention being plainly left incomplete, unless the service, subsequently to its performance, be actually presented before the Lord. Moreover, it is only upon an accepted service that any blessing can be expected. If our labour be a rejected offering, we can have no hope that a benediction will rest upon it ; so that supplication for its acceptance in heaven is of essential importance to its efficacy upon earth. In addition to these reasons, it is to be observed that the gracious acceptance of our labours on the part of our heavenly Father is a source of immediate and unutterable joy. It is an exquisite delight, fitted to the taste of the spiritual mind, and one after which we ought to feel a longing appetite ; it is a divine gratification, which God in the riches of his mercy is willing to bestow, and which he intends as the present recompense of our toil. Not to seek this acceptance would be to overlook the very chief of all the pleasures with which devotedness to God is connected, and to separate from our services the highest recompense which eternal love has allotted to them. To be insensible to the value of such a recompense could indicate nothing less than an utter ignorance of experimental piety. It enters into the felicity of the Son of God himself, in respect of the execution of the great redeeming work committed by the Father to his

hands; it constitutes the highest joy of saints and angels in the celestial world; in its amplest measure it is the bliss which is there prepared for ourselves; and there must be some afflictive and perilous peculiarity in us, if it be a delight for which we have now neither appetite nor taste. The holiest and most devoted of men have always entered most deeply into the joy of being by their labours "a sweet savour unto God."

Make it your first concern, therefore, after your endeavours for the conversion of sinners, to draw near to God, and to lay them at his footstool as services rendered to himself, and services of which you implore his gracious acceptance. Pray earnestly that he will accept them; and not only so, but that he will give you to know that he accepts them, and shed abroad in your heart a sense of his divine complacency. I hope I am not speaking to persons to whom this language will appear either unintelligible or enthusiastic. I trust, on the contrary, that you know enough of real and intimate communion with God to know how rationally such a privilege may be sought, and how truly it is within the scope of divine condescension, and Christian experience.

If we come to inquire *how* such an object is to be attained, we shall find in the outset the necessity of a *serious examination*. We shall have need to ask how much of our service it is possible to present for the acceptance of our Master. It is by no means safe to presume that the whole of it can be so presented, although it might seem natural that this should be the case. It is plain, however, that nothing more can justly be presented to God than has been really rendered to him. What we have done under the actual influence of dedication to his glory and grateful love to his mercy, that may clearly be laid at his feet; but, if anything should have been done, either through the operation of any other motives, or without the operation of these, that has not been done to God or for him, and cannot with any propriety, or with any possibility of acceptance, be presented before him. Now, we cannot proceed far in a scrutiny of our labours without perceiving that the operation of spiritual and holy motives has been by no means consistent and uniform. Even if we have been preavillingly actuated by love to the Saviour and an eye to his glory, we may find cause to acknowledge that inferior impulses have added their force, and given a mixed character

to the whole. How often may we have acted under a sense of duty merely, without the quickenings of gratitude and love! How often from the force of habit, almost without the conscious operation of any rational motive at all! How often influenced by an engagement with others, or by the known observation of our fellow-creatures! How often impelled by feelings centreing in self, whether relating to the satisfaction we might feel with ourselves, to the esteem we might gain from others, or even to the pleasure of being useful! But, if this be the case, and there is so much in our services which has not been done unto God, it is obvious that, before they are laid at his footstool, they should be thoroughly examined—*winnowed*, as it were—to divide the chaff from the wheat. For all that we have done under inferior motives, like the Scribes and the Pharisees of old, we may have our reward; but that reward can never be the smile and approbation of our Lord.

And what do you anticipate, dear brethren, as the result of such a scrutiny? You perceive, perhaps, in a moment, that there is much of your labours which you can present before God with no feelings but those of shame and contrition, and with no prayer but for pardon. Ah! when we proceed to separate the precious from the vile, to take away from the general mass of our exertions, already too small, everything which has not been influenced by love to the Saviour, and to put by itself that portion of our endeavours which has been thus actuated, what large and melancholy deductions have we to make from the apparent amount of our service! How much that might have been valuable has now no worth, but is to be thrown aside as refuse; and, in some cases, perhaps, almost or quite the whole of our exertions may be found wanting in the only qualities which can give them value before God! What an afflictive discovery is this! How much we have lost, and by what criminal heedlessness! But what is now to be done? Nothing, but to humble ourselves in the dust, and pray to be forgiven. This whole portion of our labours contains matter of the deepest humiliation; and it is highly important for us to avail ourselves of the light which the presence of God thus throws upon them, in order to disabuse ourselves of a groundless complacency in them. No exercise of mind can be more just or more salutary than, beneath the guilt of

these unholy duties, to approach to the fountain which cleanseth from all sin.

But, if our searchings of heart should leave any remainder of a more valuable kind; if in any degree we have been influenced by love to Christ and a heartfelt consecration to him, this portion of our services may be presented before him. No doubt, this also is exceedingly defective and unworthy, and deep humility becomes us; but humility, however sincere or however deep, can never require us to overlook, to misinterpret, or to undervalue, the work of the Lord in our hearts. As dedication to his glory is a state of mind on which, viewed generally, he looks with approbation, so a measure of his complacency must be associated with every individual expression of it. Having access to God, therefore, through our Lord Jesus Christ, you may justly gather up your fragments of spiritual service, and lay them at his footstool with such language as this: "Here, Lord, are some small endeavours which I have made for thee, some slight expressions of love from a heart which thou hast won to thy glory; let it please thee graciously to receive them at my hands, and to shed abroad in my breast a sense of thy condescending acceptance of these my unworthy services. If I were in heaven, this would be my highest joy; and it will be little less than heaven while I am on earth."

If you find any unsuitableness in this recommendation to the state of your minds, it is, perhaps, because you fail in respect of the primary intention by which your labours for the good of others should be characterized. They are not consciously and expressly rendered as service to God, so that it seems strange to you to speak of presenting them for acceptance before him. This is an evil you should endeavour to remedy. Or it may be because you confound the acceptance of your services with the acceptance of your persons. In this respect a little correct scriptural knowledge will be highly advantageous to you. Remember that before God we stand as sinners righteously condemned, and that we never can be accepted of him but through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the sole and the all-sufficient ground of our justification, or our acceptance as righteous. No reference whatever to our works mingles with this; nor can the acceptance of any of our works be entertained for a moment, until our persons be first accepted

through the beloved. No services can be favourably received from a rebel still in enmity, and under condemnation. But, if our persons be first of all accepted, and through the perfect and glorious righteousness of the Son of God, by which we attain a high and complete standing in the divine favour, then the way is prepared for the acceptance of our services also. Being already in a state of friendship with God, undoubtedly offerings of friendship may be presented at his footstool, and must be acceptable there. Or perhaps, while the ground is thus clear and well laid in Scripture doctrine, you may fall into perplexed and unscriptural experience. You may suffer the acceptance of your persons and your services to be blended in fact, though in theory they are distinct. Be much aware of this. Before you present your offerings of gratitude, be careful to realize your own condition of acceptance. It is only so that you will discern the possibility of the acceptance of your unworthy sacrifice, or have your heart open to the overflowing grace that will be manifested therein; not otherwise will the spirit in which you offer it be that of generous friendship, or your breast accessible to the true expression of the divine complacency.

While presenting your services before God, you should carefully endeavour to realize your personal acceptance in the beloved apart from them. You will, of course, never suffer yourselves to feel as though your dedication were the ground of your favourable approach to God. It would indicate a grievous amount of spiritual pride if you were to indulge such a feeling; while it would, with certainty, destroy the whole pleasure I am leading you to seek. There is an immense difference between seeking the divine complacency in our exertions and being complacent in them ourselves, and between the respective pleasures resulting from these states of mind. The joy of God's approbation is of an humbling and sanctifying, as well as of a most elevating, character; the joy of self-complacency is nothing better than a miserable and fruitless inflation. Self-complacency can never arise while we keep our eyes open. In addition to the fact that so large a portion of our services is too unholy to be presented before God at all, we have to remember that, wherein better motives have influenced us, we are indebted for this mercy to his own Spirit, while they have still operated so feebly, in comparison with their immeasurable greatness, as

to put us to utter confusion. Thus, while we ask our adorable Lord to accept some tokens of love, we present to him but the fruits of his own grace, and have to take shame to ourselves that they are not far more considerable; to wonder, in a word, that he will accept anything where he has to forgive so much. Oh! the very thought itself is almost annihilating, that, not only with so much meanness, but with so much unworthiness, the ever-blessed God will condescend to accept anything at our hands.

II. Having laid our endeavours for the conversion of sinners at our heavenly Father's feet, and implored his gracious acceptance of them through his dear Son, we may direct our attention, in the next place, to their *success*. This, undoubtedly, though not the primary, is a highly important object: and, if we have entered into our work with any measure of a right spirit, it is one to which we shall be keenly alive.

It is manifest that, when our utmost efforts have been employed, the end at which we have been aiming cannot be considered as accomplished. We may have given instruction, exhortation, or reproof; but by these things we have only endeavoured to bring the mind into action, in order that out of its proper action there may arise ultimate beneficial results. The actual good is to be produced by subsequent reflection. We have been sowing seed, which must have time to vegetate and bring forth its fruit. There is a clear scope, therefore, for additional efforts; an opportunity of doing something else, in order to further the influence and secure the efficacy of that which we have already done.

But, it may be asked, what further can be done? While we are engaged with a person we may exert an influence upon him, but in what manner can any be exercised after we have left him? Ah! there is a being who is continually present with him, and can exercise a constant power over his spirit; a being to whom you likewise may have access, and whose agency you may engage to give perpetuity and efficacy to your own. You know his name. It is God, the Father of our spirits, and the God of all flesh. He can carry on the work when you are obliged to lay it aside, and bring into continual bearing on the conscience and the heart the words which you uttered but in a moment. Implore his aid, therefore. Bow yourself before him in prayer, and beseech

him to make the work his own: "O Lord, I beseech thee send now prosperity."

You are well acquainted, moreover, with the general and important truth, that God himself is the giver of every good and perfect gift. No means are successful without his blessing; and, although one may plant and another water, it is he who giveth the increase. To anticipate success without seeking his blessing on the means we have employed, would indicate an entire oversight of this truth, or a very high degree of self-confidence and presumption. Prayer in connexion with our endeavours is a most just acknowledgment of our weakness and dependence, together with the supremacy, the sovereignty, and the bounty of the Lord of all. If we do desire success, in what method can that desire so naturally and so justly express itself, as in supplication to him from whom all success proceeds? If we are not found imploring his blessing, what reason can we have to suppose that we desire it? And, if we do not desire it, upon what ground can we imagine that we shall receive it? Not to follow up our endeavours with prayer, is to cut ourselves off from the only fountain of energy by which vital power can be poured into the means we have employed.

It is further known to us, that our endeavours for the conversion of sinners are opposed by very peculiar and inveterate causes. We have the whole force of human depravity to contend with. We are striving to produce impressions which the feelings of every moment are adapted to efface, as the recurring waves obliterate instantly our footsteps on the sand. Perhaps ignorance is so dense as almost to defy our endeavours to communicate knowledge; or, if we do make ourselves understood, our message is so unwelcome that there is little probability of its being regarded, or even remembered. The world is loved with a fondness, and sin is held with a tenacity, which seem not only to repel but to deride our toil. We know, too, from him who searcheth the heart, and who in kindness has forewarned us of the depth of its wickedness, that, unless divine power interpose, all our endeavours will actually be repelled, and that it is to God's own arm alone that sinners will yield. And knowing this, to restrain prayer were not only the most unaccountable forgetfulness, it were little short of insanity. It would be greater wisdom to make no efforts at all for the conversion

of sinners, than to separate them from earnest supplication that God will render them availing, as in the day of his power.

God has not required us to throw ourselves alone in the midst of these spiritual wickednesses to our certain confusion and defeat. His blessing is not less free than it is necessary. If it is essential to our success, he is also infinitely willing to bestow it. He is far from standing aloof, and leaving us to our weakness; he bids us lay hold on his strength, and readily girds himself also for the war. The outpouring of his blessed Spirit is promised in answer to prayer; and he hath never said, Seek ye me in vain. What, therefore, should we mean, if we were not to follow up our labours with prayer? To omit seeking that aid without which all our toil would be fruitless, while it would be most readily granted at our request? How glaring an inconsistency! How strange a contradiction! Dear brethren, surely you will not be guilty of it; but, as often as you have been wrestling with sinners, you will be found likewise in your solitudes wrestling with God, that, prevailing with him, you may, like Jacob, prevail with men.

Care and enlargement in this exercise are the more necessary, because of the great principle of God's government that he will honour those by whom he is honoured. By the manner in which he pours out his blessing he exercises an important discipline over our hearts. Where he sees the deepest abasement, the most earnest desire, and in other respects an attitude of mind the most conformable with his will and glory, there he leads us to expect the most ample benediction; where, on the contrary, he sees the heart least humbled, least enlarged, and rendering him the least honour, he finds reasons to diminish or to withhold his blessing. This method is undoubtedly a wise and a holy one, and it ought to be powerfully influential with us. You will readily perceive that it bears, not only on the quantity of our prayers, but on their quality also. You know, doubtless, of what different qualities prayer may be, and of what various character the desires which have a real existence within us, and a sincere utterance before God. The nature of these desires needs to be closely examined. It is by cherishing such feelings as are most honourable to God, and by mortifying those which are least so, that we shall connect our labours with his most abundant blessing.

It might seem, perhaps, as though, if we did desire the success of our endeavours for the conversion of sinners, little danger of impropriety could attach to a feeling so obviously right. But let us look a little more closely into this matter.

Our desires need watching as to their *comprehensiveness*. They are apt to assume a very contracted and limited form. A familiar instance of this, to which I hope I may refer without offence, is to be found in the exercise of social or public prayer, in which it is frequently entreated that "some poor sinner" may be the subject of divine mercy on that occasion. But why is the petition limited to *one* of the "poor sinners" present? Do not all equally need the Lord's mercy? Have we not compassion enough to pray for all? Or do we think that God's mercy is not ample enough to extend to all? A tendency to something of the same kind may very frequently be detected by us. We desire and expect but little; and thus, like the king of Israel, who shot but three when he was desired to shoot as many arrows as he wished to obtain victories, we do dishonour to our bountiful God, and curtail the success of our own exertions. God is bountiful, and ready to perform works of mercy on a large scale, yet we cannot expect to receive more than we desire. Why should the narrowness of our desires contract the vastness of his love? Why should we hesitate to expand our prayers to the utmost extent of his possible blessing; or need to be told twice, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it"?

Our desires need watching as to their *importunity*. It may not be quite certain, perhaps, that we long *very ardently* for the conversion even of those for whom we have been labouring; the strength of our desire, if justly estimated, may be far below the real value of the object. But let us beware of this. Importunity does much towards the success of prayer. The heart-searching God cannot be pleased to see us asking for inestimable blessings without proportionate earnestness. However sincerely we may ask for the conversion of sinners, if it be in a spirit of so little importunity that we can bear a refusal, a refusal may probably be given us. It is when our success becomes to us a matter of deep anxiety, of oppressive and almost overwhelming concern; when we make the interest of a perishing fellow-sinner our

own, and bear it before God so ardently as to say, with Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me;" it is then that we are most likely to prevail. These are the prayers which indicate the highest sense of the value of the blessing, and which God may most consistently honour with an answer of mercy. If you really wish to prevail, therefore, stir up your heart to a just and intense importunity.

It is needful we should examine the *ultimate object*, or reason, of our desires. For, admitting that it is the conversion of sinners we desire, this may be desired for a variety of reasons, not all of them equally acceptable to God. We may desire it, for example, because they are persons with whom we have taken pains, and as a gratification to ourselves; or because they are in some particular relation to us, as parents, or children, or friends; or because they would be added to the church with which we are connected, or would afford joy to the minister whom we love; or for other reasons of a similar kind. Now it is manifest that all such desires may partake very little of a spiritual character, and that they do not extend to that which should be the great object of desire, namely, the glory of God and of his Son Jesus Christ. They may be described as essentially selfish, and as containing little or nothing which can be acceptable to our heavenly Father. To show this, only let us imagine ourselves putting them into words, and pleading with God on these grounds: "Lord, I have been taking great pains with these ignorant persons; now I beseech thee gratify me by their conversion." It is impossible we could use such language as this; but, if the language be obviously improper, the thought, though less glaringly, must be equally so. This observation may be followed up, so as to apply to desires for the conversion of sinners even *for their own sake*. Not that it is *wrong* to desire the salvation of sinners because their destruction will be dreadful, but that it is *defective*. It is right so far, but it does not go far enough. We should view the salvation of sinners in all cases as connected with the glory of God, and desire it *for his glory*: otherwise we clearly fail of a right spirit herein. We are not to be censured for feeling on the grounds I have enumerated, on the contrary, they are all of them just and proper grounds of feeling: but as, on the one hand, our feeling should not stop there, but should always be excited in reference to the glory

of God also, so, more especially, when we come to present our desires before him, all others should be merged in this primary and absorbing one. We should be able to say: "Lord, if I seek the salvation of these persons, it is not because my poor labours have been bestowed on their instruction; it is not because they are my relatives, and so peculiarly interesting to me; it is not because they will augment my party, or increase my estimation; neither is it because it will save souls from death: but it is because thy name will be glorified thereby. Gain thyself honour upon them by the victories of thy grace, and give them in recompense of the travail of thy Son." It is obvious that prayer of this tenour does more honour to God than all the rest, that it is more accordant with his will, and more adapted to obtain a blessing. He loves to see the creature shrink into nothing in the presence of the Creator, and to behold every wish amalgamating with, and absorbed in, the glory of his name. This is acceptable with him, and will eminently be honoured by him.

If we wish prayer to prevail, it should be the prayer of *faith*. I am aware, indeed, that on this subject there are two extremes to be avoided, and that false confidence is as much to be shunned as unbelief. Pious persons have sometimes indulged themselves in the positive expectation of particular results: as when parents have entertained a confidence that their children would be converted, or when a minister has assured himself of a revival in the scene of his labours. Such feelings have commonly arisen from strong exercises of mind, from being much enlarged in prayer for these specific objects, or from a consciousness of having been enabled to bear them before God in faith. That out of such exercises there should arise a strong persuasion that the objects will be granted, is not perhaps unnatural in minds of a sanguine temperament; yet I cannot but conceive that it is carried much too far, when it is relied upon as a certain indication of the divine intention, or "almost as a promise." I know of no scriptural ground, or warrant, for such a persuasion. We have many assurances of God's willingness to hear and answer prayer; but, as these cannot be understood to intimate that *every* blessing asked for shall be bestowed (a result as impossible in itself as it is inconsistent with facts), so neither, now that inspiration has ceased, can

any authority be found for the certain expectation of any particular event. That some extraordinary fulfilments of such expectations have occurred is nothing to the purpose; there have doubtless been, also, many instances of their frustration. While God has done everything to awaken activity and to encourage hope, he has authorized no certainty of single results. In every prayer he requires submission as well as trust; and in every case, our individual perdition and sinfulness excepted, when we have used every means, and presented the most earnest supplications, he calls upon us to be ready to say, if the issue should require it, The will of the Lord be done.

But if, on the one hand, there is danger of presumption, on the other, there is far more danger of despondency. If our desires are often small, our faith is generally less. Having, perhaps, a realizing view of the difficulties in the way of a sinner's conversion, but not having a due impression of the boundless power and mercy of the God of salvation, we make our supplication with fear and trembling, scarcely thinking it can be fulfilled, and often astonished if we find it to be so. Sometimes we are so much discouraged, perhaps, by the hardness of heart we have witnessed, that we think it can hardly be of any use to pray. And what justification do we think we have for such prayers as these? Or what effects do we expect from them? Are these the high thoughts of the Saviour by which we imagine to do him honour? Have we forgotten the declaration, "Whatsoever things ye shall ask *believing*, ye shall receive"? Did we never read the commendation of the prevailing supplicant, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt"? Do we wish the spheres of our labour to be blasted, like that desolate region in which Christ could do no mighty works because of their unbelief? If we do not, it is high time that our unbelief should be remedied. It is too long that we have gone to his footstool with the desponding language, "Lord, if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us:" it is time we should hear the pungent rebuke, "If thou canst believe: all things are possible to him that believeth." Let us fix in our hearts the most unquestionable conviction that, in the conversion of sinners, there is nothing which Christ is unable, or unwilling, to do. It is this kind of prayer which, if I may so speak, makes

room for his interposition, and gives scope for the full sweep of that mighty arm by which all things shall be subdued under him.

By these observations it has been my wish to convince you that, after your immediate endeavours of instruction have ceased, well-adapted and mighty efforts may be made for their furtherance and success. Do not think your work done when you leave the listening class, or the tenement of sin; the same work remains to be pursued in your chamber, and, if your prayers there be of a working kind, the most extensive and blessed results may follow. It should be your concern to see that you are not wanting in this respect: if success be not granted you, let it not be because you have not asked it, or asked it in a manner which God might acknowledge. Want of success under any circumstances is sufficiently grievous; but nothing can add so much to its bitterness as to discover that it has arisen from our own conduct. What pungent sorrow will it give us if we should have to say hereafter, "I might have been more successful in the conversion of sinners if I had more abounded in prayer; but I indulged a spirit of self-sufficiency, of indifference, of selfishness, or of unbelief, which made it necessary that success should be withheld for the punishment and correction of my sin." What a terror is thus attached to the indulgence of evil! What a bounty is associated with the cultivation of a right spirit!

What is the real intensity of our longings for the salvation of those for whom we labour? Its whole force tends to impel us to our closets, and to melt our very souls into the language of the psalmist—"O Lord, I beseech thee send now prosperity!"

LECTURE IX.

INDIRECT EXERCISES AFTER LABOUR.

"They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept."—*Canticles* i. 6.

IN the preceding Lecture I have shown you, dear brethren, that your endeavours for the conversion of sinners should be followed by devotional exercises, adapted to engage both your heavenly Father's acceptance of your labours, and his blessing upon them. But this is not all. Exertions of this kind *have an influence on personal piety* which demands attentive regard. While busily employed for the souls of others, you have need to look with peculiar care to the condition of your own. Your very activity may give origin to snares against which you should be on your guard, or to perplexities which you should be able to solve.

I. Exertion for the good of others may be connected with *self-neglect*. Every object that gains much of our attention and interest is apt to draw us off from the vigorous cultivation of personal piety; and though such an effect might be little anticipated from pursuits of a religious kind, yet experience has abundantly shown that they are, in this respect, little, if at all, less dangerous than secular engagements. We may easily devote ourselves with so much eagerness to efforts of pious usefulness, as to overlook in part, or to pursue with less earnestness and diligence, the important exercises of the closet. The time allotted to these exercises may be infringed upon and shortened; or the attention paid to the discipline of the heart therein may become less close and severe, through the distraction of the mind. This ill effect is so much the more probable as it may seem to be justified by a sufficient reason. We should not suffer ourselves to abridge our closet duties, perhaps, for worldly business or pleasure; but to make this sacrifice for the sake of doing good to the souls of men is a different thing, and one for which much more may be said. It is, besides, much more easy and agreeable to employ ourselves in probing another's heart, than in examining our own. Of all the exercises of piety, those of the closet are the most

difficult and unwelcome. They bring us under the weightiest influences of eternal things, and into an immediate strife with our inbred iniquities; they lead to self-reproof, they call for humiliation and renunciation of sin, they awaken strenuous effort: but the instruction and persuasion of others can be conducted without any of this trouble, and, indeed, with a sense of pleasure and satisfaction; so that, whenever it is thought allowable to transfer our attention to this latter object, there is a great probability of its being preferred. And why, we may sometimes ask, why should it not be allowable? The occupation is wholly of a religious nature; and may it not reasonably be expected, that in promoting the edification of others we shall find our own?

These plausible and seductive representations do but conceal a snare. They lead us, while keeping the vineyards of others, to neglect that which demands our more immediate care, and thus both to inconsistency, to mischief, and to sin.

1. Neglect of personal piety is *sinful*, inasmuch as the cultivation of the heart is our primary duty. It matters not that what we are doing is good and useful; the maintenance of fellowship with God, the advancement of conformity to his image, the vigorous mortification of sin, are obligatory on us above all things, even above all good things; and there is no rectitude in neglecting a primary duty in order to attend to a secondary one. If with respect to efforts for usefulness it may be said, These things ought ye to have done; with respect to exercises of closet piety it may be said, also, These ought ye not to have left undone. By the neglect of them God is dishonoured and displeased. That we have been teaching the ignorant and reclaiming the lost, is no sufficient apology for the omission of those expressions of gratitude, dependence, and dedication, which are perpetually due from us to our Maker and our Lord.

2. Neglect of personal piety cannot be otherwise than *mischievous*. It is mischievous to ourselves, because it infallibly leads to declension. However willingly we may suppose that spirituality and holiness may be preserved by being in the midst of engagements of a religious nature, it will be uniformly found that this is not the fact. A lively state of mind in religion can never be maintained with a deserted closet. The heart requires to be often withdrawn from all inferior objects, and to be brought into immediate intercourse

with the Father of spirits ; otherwise the sense of our relation to him is speedily lost, and with it everything that is influential or valuable in religion. It is in his light that we see light. Whatever power the things of an eternal world may at any time have exercised upon us, if we are not frequently looking at them afresh their influence will quickly fade, and soon altogether vanish. The evils of the heart, if it be not habitually searched and disciplined, will resume a rapid growth, and acquire a prevailing dominion. To neglect the cultivation of personal piety, therefore, is inevitably to consign it to decay. And this is surely a most serious mischief. What can recompense us for a lukewarm and a deadened heart ? What will be to us even the salvation of others, if we ourselves should perish ? What will it avail us to have kept the vineyards of others, if our own be unfruitful ?

But the mischief of a neglected heart is not confined to ourselves ; it will extend also to others, and to the very exertions we are making for their good. For what is the impulse of these exertions ? What is it that awakens us to the condition of the ungodly, that quickens our sloth, that subdues our shame, that unseals our lips, that inspires us with earnest solemnity ? Is it not the force of inward piety, the power with which we realize the objects of a future world, and the influences we derive from communion with our beloved Lord ? And, when these decay, what is to become of the efforts which have sprung from them ? They will infallibly decay also. You will lose your anxiety to be useful ; the wretchedness of sinners will affect you less deeply ; you will want a more powerful summons to draw you to the scenes of guilt and misery ; you will be less prompt in improving opportunities, and even in seeing them ; you will act with less vigour ; you will yield to the influence of sinful shame ; you will be less earnest and solemn in your address ; and the efforts of usefulness which you do not abandon will be converted into a routine of duties, cold, heartless, and loathed. And will all this be no mischief ? What, to see those very exertions for the sake of which you have sacrificed your soul's prosperity lie around you in neglected fragments, half-abandoned, and wholly unprofitable ! Dreadful result ! Yet the sure issue of a neglected heart.

3. It must be added, that the neglect of personal piety

while you are seeking the conversion of others is glaringly *inconsistent*. The principles which impel you to one are clearly adapted to lead you to both. If you value the soul of another because you have first learned to value your own, it is surely strange that, while you are caring for the spiritual welfare of others, your own should be forgotten. What can be the reason or the meaning of this? Either your neglect of personal piety throws ridicule on your concern for others, or your concern for them should put your negligence to shame. If the concerns of religion be important enough to lead you to press them on the attention of another, how is it that they do not engage your own? Some grievous inconsistency is here; and one from which you should make an instant escape, if you would not have all your exertions for others' good converted into cutting reproofs of your sin and folly.

See to it, then, dear brethren, that if, as I hope, you are diligent in endeavouring to turn sinners unto God, you are not thereby seduced from a close walk with him yourselves. While keeping the vineyards of others, remember the paramount importance of cultivating your own; think of the sin, the mischief, the inconsistency, of neglecting it; and so pursue every course of activity for the souls of men that you may never have to utter the bitter lamentation, "They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

II. Our exertions may give rise to *self-complacency*, or spiritual pride. Pride, which reigns in the heart of a carnal man, exists in that of the spiritual, and is ready to avail itself of everything on which it can feed. We shall not make many efforts to do good without having occasion to acknowledge its exercise; and, if we are not, like Jehu, betrayed into the exclamation, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of hosts," we may detect ourselves in the indulgence of a secret satisfaction and complacency of no hallowed kind. I need not say to any experimental Christian that this is a great evil. With all the sweetness which there may be in a feeling of self-complacency, there is in it no *happiness*; this lies in contrition and brokenness of heart. The indulgence of spiritual pride, indeed, constitutes a state of miserable inflation, in which there is no breathing of the soul after God, and can be none of his complacency in us; which tends

to conceal every sin, to extinguish every grace, and to annihilate every impulse of action and all sense of obligation. It is a state in which piety cannot prosper, in which every evil is rapidly generated, and which is never remedied but by painful and heart-breaking exercises.

The methods of preventing or mortifying such an evil are of the most obvious kind. As no feeling is more ready to arise, so none has less cause. It is only to look it in the face and recall a few familiar facts, and it will be withered and put to shame. It is not at all necessary that, for this purpose, we should overlook, or depreciate, whatever in us may be really devoted or laborious. Humility needs not to be fostered by delusions. It does not consist in seeing ourselves otherwise than we are, but in taking a right view of ourselves as we are. It is pride that is generated in falsehood, and nurtured by misrepresentation. Let it be admitted that you are, in some measure, and perhaps in a considerable measure, active for God and the souls of men; set your labours before your eyes in their just magnitude and proportion; estimate them at their full value, and allow of no undue acknowledgments of sloth, of no spurious and uncalled-for abasement; and still we say that you need but recollect two or three things to exterminate your pride, and cover you with shame.

1. It is, in the first place, to be remembered, that whatever we have done has been moved by the Spirit of God, and not by our own. Devotedness to God, and compassion for the souls of men, are among the last things which would ever have been in our hearts, if we had been left to ourselves. Sloth, self-indulgence, shame, fear, indifference, these are our natural characteristics, and they would have remained so to this day had it not been for the communication of an influence from heaven of which we are utterly unworthy. Touching as the considerations are which we have now been brought to feel, our hearts are base enough to have long disregarded them all; and, in order to render us alive to them, it has required no less than an almighty power. And are we going to feed our spiritual pride with this? Verily, we ought rather to be overwhelmed with shame. What infinite condescension was it that the blessed Spirit should transfuse his gracious influences into such hearts as ours, and make us the instruments by which he would display the

wonders of his grace ! Can it ever become a question with us to whom the praise of such efforts belongs ?

2. We may recollect, too, that, even if we have done *all* that corresponds with our obligations to our Lord and Saviour, we have done *no more*. We have been barely just. That which we have dedicated to him is only that which he first gave us, and which is become doubly his by the costly purchase of redeeming blood. Not the smallest portion of it could we have withheld from him without the perpetration of a robbery, and the consecration of all our powers and resources to our Lord is but a compliance with the most powerful and constraining obligations. Of what, then, can we be proud ? If we had been showing kindness to one who had no claims upon us, if we had been rendering gratuitous service, then, indeed, some little complacency might be pleaded for ; but what man would think of making a boast that he was actually honest, and had neither robbed his master nor his creditors ? Yet this is all we can say, even if we have done *all* that we might have done ; and this is the sentiment which our Lord teaches us to adopt when he says : “ Having done all, say ye, we are unprofitable servants ; we have done that which it was our duty to do.”

3. But we may go further than this. Let us take a just view of our obligations, and we shall find cause to acknowledge that we have come most afflictively short of them. One great reason, indeed, why our pride finds so much to feed upon is, that we suffer ourselves to take so very contracted and erroneous a view of our duty. We compare ourselves most readily, either with ourselves at some former period, or with others at the present ; and, if we find that we are more active either than others are, or than we once were, we almost infallibly indulge complacency on this account. But nothing can be more fallacious than such an estimate. Let us cease from these delusive and mischievous comparisons, and turn to a different standard. The question for us to ask is, What are our obligations ? What extent of dedication do they require ? With what power of motive do they enforce it ? We cannot doubt for a moment that there is required of us an *entire* dedication to the glory and service of God ; the dedication of every power, of every moment ; the use of every means, the improvement of every opportunity ; without fear, without shame, without apathy, without

weariness. Nor can anything be more touching or influential than the motives by which this entire consecration is pressed upon us. What can be of more weighty justice than our obligation to him that made us? Or what of more constraining tenderness than the love of him that redeemed us? Are we bought with a price, even with the precious blood of Christ, so that we are no more our own, but his? 'Are we by him reconciled to God, and restored to his friendship? And what if we fail in the duties of friendship so restored, or withhold in any degree the dedication of a heart and life so purchased? Yet this is what we have done. To whatever extent our devotedness may have been carried, none of us can pretend for a moment that it has been perfect and without fault. But this is to say far too little. In comparison with the prompt and habitual dedication required of us, how much have we manifested of indifference and sloth, of self-indulgence and neglect! How often have we been unobservant of opportunities, or slow in improving them; how often have we been withheld by fear, or by a guilty shame! How often has the spirit of dedication been wanting in our exertions, so that there has been little or nothing in them on which our Lord could cast an approving smile! With all our activity, then, there still remains much to be lamented, much of criminal ingratitude, much of unkind return for love which ought to set all our hearts on fire; and, with such a load of iniquity lying on us, is it possible we can swell out with pride? Are we going so to look at what we have done for Christ as to overlook what we have not done, and to pass by so much ingratitude without any shame and bitterness of spirit? Let it never be while our very services contain so much to abase us, and require to be presented at the footstool of our gracious Lord, unworthy offerings as they are, with so much shame and confusion of face.

III. Our labours may occasion *exhaustion*. I refer now to the state in which we may sometimes return from the scenes of our activity to our sacred retirements. We could have wished, doubtless, and perhaps we may have expected, to pass easily and delightfully from one mode of serving God to another, and to find the heart fully prepared to use, as matter of solitary piety, the topics which have engaged us for the instruction of others. You may have been disappointed in this expectation. After such exertions, you may

have entered into your closet only to find yourself utterly unprepared for the exercises of secret piety, and, indeed, incapable of them. Your thoughts are distracted, your feelings unawakened, or you might rather say that you have no thoughts, no feelings, no head, no heart. You fail in every attempt you make to read, to think, to pray; and this perplexes, vexes, and afflicts you. It seems as though you had poured out all your religious feelings to others, and that none remained within your own breast.

1. Yet this is capable of explanation. In part it may be referred to the influence of bodily weariness. The work in which you have been engaged, if you have carried it to any considerable extent, is one which makes large, though, perhaps, unperceived, demands upon your strength, whether it be by the effort of continued speaking or conversation, or by the exercise of the mind in endeavours to turn it to good effect. Without being fully aware of it, therefore, you may return in a state of great exhaustion; and if in such a condition you should enter into your closet, you would doubtless find all your exercises there affected by the general languor of your frame. It is manifest that such a case as this requires considerable allowance. It argues nothing in reality against the spirituality of your mind. The soul sympathizes with the body, and is clogged by its weariness; but, nevertheless, it is neither just nor reasonable to attribute that to the soul which belongs exclusively to the body. Our Lord himself has said, and allows us on proper occasions to appropriate the sentiment, "The spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak." Under such circumstances, it is far better to betake yourselves to refreshment or repose, without tasking either the body or the mind for efforts of which at the moment they are alike incapable.

In reference to this mitigating consideration, it is doubtless important to possess a criterion by which we may judge with some satisfaction whether our apparent deadness be of a physical or a moral kind; since no person of a tender conscience, or a right spirit, would be willing to avail himself of a mere pretext for disguising real indifference. Nor is it at all difficult for such a criterion to be found. Ask yourselves only, whether the unfitness which you feel for the exercises of religion extends itself equally to other occupations. If it does, you may safely refer it to bodily exhaustion; but, if it

does not, you have reason to suspect some lurking mischief. If you are well enough to attend to worldly business, to converse with earthly friends, or to read the newspaper, you ought to be well enough to read your Bible, and to commune with God; and you would be so, if your heart were in a spiritual frame. If, on the contrary, you can do nothing else, of course, it is not to be expected that you can attend to the exercises of religion; and then you may leave yourself with confidence in the hands of him who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust.

2. While our unfitness for devotional exercises may be ascribed in part to bodily exhaustion, it may be referred, perhaps, in a still greater measure, to the forcible direction of our thoughts into a different channel. It may have appeared to us, indeed, that the communication of religious instruction to others is so like the application of it to ourselves, that it would be natural and easy to pass from the one to the other. But, in fact, the two exercises are widely different. In both cases, it is true, we are engaged substantially upon the truths of religion; but a little reflection will convince us that adapting them to, and bringing them to bear upon, the heart of another, is a very different occupation from that of applying them to our own. It is the difference between cooking and eating, between the preparation of food and the reception of it; and it was never known, I believe, that the preparation of food either nourished the body, or peculiarly sharpened the appetite. Our efforts in imparting religious instruction will have the same effect in unfitting us for the engagements of secret devotion that any other occupation would have, and we shall find occasion for as much exertion of thought and discipline of mind as if we were retiring from the family or the world. The whole object and aim which we have in doing others good is distinct, and widely diverse, from that which we pursue in the discipline of our own hearts: in the two cases we look at different things, we seek different results, we use different means; we cannot, therefore, expect to pass from one to the other without being sensible of the change, or without an effort of reflection. It may be added that our difficulty will be augmented in proportion to the intensity with which our minds have been engaged in the work of instruction, because the force necessary to divert our thoughts from a previous

channel is always proportionate to that with which they have been impelled into it. For this reason it is probable that ministers of the Gospel feel more of this trial than others, their minds being most intensely occupied in preparation for public instruction; but other persons may anticipate the experience of it also, in full proportion to the strength and anxiety with which they may be engaged in their work and labour of love.

To explain this difficulty, however, is not to remove it. So far as it arises from an exercise of mind in a direction different from that of private devotion, it plainly requires to be contended with, like distraction of mind resulting from worldly business, or from any other cause. We should be very much aware of giving way to it, as a state which either need not, or cannot, be overcome. Its direct tendency is to the diminution and decay of spirituality, as, if it be indulged, we shall soon find to our cost; and it is highly important, therefore, that it should be instantly checked. Nor is this by any means impracticable. It requires only the same efforts which are always found necessary to withdraw our attention from earthly thoughts. It needs only that we should recollect ourselves, and call to mind that, as we have been teaching others, so now we are come to teach ourselves, and to lay open our own hearts before God. If the mind does not in an instant turn from one employment to another, it does so by degrees, and no well-directed effort for this end is lost. A diligent and vigorous entertainment of suitable topics will succeed in turning our attention from the state of others to our own, and in attaining the fixed communion with God after which we have aspired. What we should deeply impress ourselves with is that this *is* necessary, and the more necessary in proportion to the abundance of our exertions. Our Lord Jesus Christ spent whole days in instruction, but he also spent whole nights in prayer.

We should take heed, likewise, that we do not carry too far the allowance which may be justly made for corporeal exhaustion. If we may on this ground properly excuse ourselves from a vigorous effort of secret devotion in the evening, it does not therefore follow that the same excuse extends to the morning. Upon the contrary, with the return of bodily strength returns the obligation of retirement and prayer, and we should be watchful to apply the

first of our restored energy to these sacred exercises. We shall find our inconstant and treacherous hearts too prone to make use of the apology long after it has ceased to be just. The slightest consciousness of such a tendency must be considered as indicating that the actual omission of secret fellowship with God, however justifiable, has already done us mischief, and should impress us with the conviction that a more than usual vigour of solitary piety will be necessary to prevent the permanence and aggravation of the evil. What you lose by weariness in the evening, you should endeavour to regain by extraordinary diligence in the morning.

IV. Our efforts may be attended with *conflict*. I am aware that conflict, though not a uniform, is not an unfrequent attendant on active experimental piety; but we notice it now as it may be more especially excited by augmented labours in the cause of God, and the souls of men. When your hearts are most powerfully stirred up to identify yourselves with the honour of your Lord and the progress of his Gospel, and to make the most resolute exertions on behalf of the guilty and the lost, you find, perhaps, that your closets become the scene of an inward strife. You seem to have less sensibility to divine things than ever; you stand painfully convicted of feeling nothing, or almost nothing, either for God or for man; your prayers are embarrassed by the conscious feebleness, if not the entire absence, of desire; you seem to fail in every attempt to get near to God; you find your secret exercises produce scarcely any other effect than an augmentation of your distress; and you leave the presence of your God with a heavy heart. You cannot say, indeed, that at these periods you are without comfort in the social exercises of piety, or without the presence of God in his work; but these things make it yet more strange and afflicting to you that your solitary hours should be so unsatisfactorily spent.

1. But these perplexities are not incapable of solution. When, according to your own perceptions, you are more than ever characterized by indifference, self-indulgence, and sloth, it does not necessarily follow that these evils are really most abundant. It is true that you see more of them; but this may be either because more light is thrown upon them, or because your discernment is become more acute. When a person who, during the night, had dimly discerned the

objects around him begins to see them more clearly, he does not imagine that the objects themselves are changed; he knows that the effect is to be ascribed to the dawning of the day. However perplexed the half-restored blind man might have been who saw the "trees walking" converted into men, we know, and he soon came to know, that the change took place only in his organs of sight. It is thus when we see more of our inward evils. They were in our breast before in their full magnitude and enormity, though we did not distinctly or powerfully discern them; and the light which has discovered them to us has no more created them than a lamp carried into a deserted building would create the owls, the bats, and the vermin, congregated there.

If an augmented view of our corruptions does not argue their actual aggravation, neither does a new consciousness of a want of feeling establish an augmented insensibility. You reprove yourself more severely than you ever did for indifference towards the great objects which should inflame all your heart; not, verily, because you are more indifferent to them than you were, but because, by a brighter view of their excellency, you are more deeply impressed with their desert. You are bitterly ashamed that you desire them so little; which is only saying in other words, that your heart is more powerfully exercised about them than it has been. You suffer an inward conflict; your spirit feels its bonds, and pines that it cannot escape; that is to say, your desires are vigorously awakened, and you are making arduous efforts after growing dedication to the Lord.

The truth is, that, instead of indicating a low and declining state of piety, your self-abasement and inward conflict are unequivocal evidences of vigour and prosperity. It is a general rule that our corruptions most abound when they are least seen and contended with. The seasons when we really are most unconcerned and slothful are those in which we should be least willing to acknowledge it, or should speak of it with the least severity of self-reproof.

2. In harmony with this view, and in confirmation of it, I may observe that such seasons of humiliation and conflict are not characterized by the neglect of practical piety. On the contrary, I think I may safely say that you are never more jealous of your temper, never more careful of your example, never more resolved for action, never more watch-

ful of opportunities, never more solemn and affectionate, never more prayerful and dependent, than at such periods. With however little comfort, you are constrained to be faithful both to your fellow-men and to your Lord; and with all the severity of your inward exercises there is combined a weighty sense and an habitual remembrance of obligation, which bears you forward with an unusual steadiness through the duties of the day. But these are some of the best and most substantial fruits of piety. What better effects could any exercises of mind produce?

3. To this it may be added, that powerful exercises of mind, of whatever nature, may be regarded as an indication that God is fitting you for labour, and means to give you his blessing. Perhaps no kind of experience is more adapted to prepare us for usefulness than such as partakes largely of self-abasement and conflict. It makes us know both our weakness and our strength; it opens to us the workings of our own hearts that we may be the better able to trace those of others; it endears the Saviour to ourselves before we go to recommend him to the lost. And is not all this well? Does it look as though God was angry with us, and meant to desert us in his work? Can we say that, in conjunction with such experience, he does desert us in his work? On the contrary, is he not with us? Does he not stand by us and keep us? And is it not in such seasons, so far as we can trace his dispensations, that he grants our principal success?

4. On this point it is not unworthy of notice, that many persons have trod the same path before us. And though the rule is by no means universal, yet in very numerous instances men of eminent usefulness have been men of tried experience. It seems as though many of us could not be fitted for communicating spiritual riches, without ourselves being made to pass through the fire in order to be purified from our dross. You will read the life of scarcely any person of considerable usefulness in the Lord's work, without meeting with accounts of deep abasement and distress. If we wish to partake of their joy, we must lay our account with partaking of their sorrows too; and, if we do resemble them in our griefs, we may hope to resemble them in their success.

What we have to learn is, in one word, neither to mis-

understand, nor to repine at, a state of mental trial and conflict. Without being pleasant or desirable on its own account, it is always profitable and gracious; it is an evidence that God is dealing with us in mercy; and we need only to keep near to him to find that the end of the Lord herein is both for our good and for his glory. If, on the one hand, a lively state of the soul without conflict might be rather desired, on the other, the severest conflict is infinitely to be preferred to the peacefulness and tranquillity of slumber. The first matter of thankfulness is to be kept awake; and, if we childishly repine at the difficulties which meet us when our eyes are open, we may, perhaps, be suffered to fall again into a sleep, with the wretchedness and mischief of which all the conflicts of Christian experience are not once to be compared.

LECTURE X.

SUCCESS EXPECTED.

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.”—2 *Corinthians* x. 4.

UPON the supposition, dear brethren, which I trust I may entertain, that you feel it your duty to strive for the conversion of sinners, and that you acquit yourselves of the obligation, I have spoken to you of the engagements which should precede your labours, of the manner in which they should be performed, and of the exercises by which they should be followed. It might seem now that the subject was exhausted; but, before we quite take our leave of it, one topic of no inconsiderable interest awaits our regard. As your toil is directed to some ulterior object beyond the mere execution of the work, so your anxieties, it may be presumed, are by no means laid to rest when the work is done; there is a result anticipated and watched for, the fruit and the recompense of your labours. This result is the actual conversion of sinners to God by your instrumentality; an object which is fitted to awaken the most lively feelings, and in relation to which our minds need to be diligently cultivated.

In reference to this interesting subject, *the success of our labours*, I shall confine myself on the present occasion to three simple truths: the first is, that it should be earnestly desired; the second, that it may be cheerfully expected; the third, that it should be justly estimated.

I. First, in our endeavours for the conversion of sinners *success should be earnestly desired*.

It might seem almost unnecessary to insist on so obvious a sentiment. Of course, every one who engages in such a work does long for success, and with a degree of anxiety, it may be reasonably supposed, which has more need to be allayed than to be augmented; yet, however natural such a state of mind may be, and with whatever apparent safety its existence might be taken for granted, we shall find in fact that there is the utmost necessity for being jealous of our own hearts on this point. It is very possible for much to be done by us in the instruction and exhortation of the ungodly with a marvellously small portion of desire for their actual conversion. Among the sources to which such an evil may be traced, two may be here noticed. In the first place, we may find ourselves apt to look rather at the work to be done than at the object to be attained; we may enter upon it more under a sense of the obligation of discharging a duty, than impelled by a desire of accomplishing an end; and in this case we shall be equally prone, when our labour is over, to rest in the work performed, and to be complacent in having communicated instruction or reproof, without any eager looking for beneficial results. In the second place, despondency may produce a similar effect. Perceiving, what indeed is too obvious, that men are blind, inconstant, and stubborn, and reckoning it almost certain that little or no good will result from our endeavours, we may come to have little or no desire that good may be done. Other causes no doubt contribute their influence to the same end. But the state of mind, however produced, is most evil and mischievous, and it demands an immediate remedy. On no point should we exercise a closer inspection of our feelings, or a more earnest care to rectify them.

Inquire then, dear brethren, how it is with yourselves. You labour, as I hope, for the souls of men. Do you seize upon their real conversion to God as the object at which you aim, and without accomplishing which you can have no

satisfaction? Are you casting an anxious glance over the field you have been cultivating, to see whether the seed is springing up, and affording you any prospect of a harvest? Or, having laboured, do you retire contented with duty performed, scarcely knowing whether any good has resulted from your toil, or scarcely moved to sorrow if an entire unfruitfulness prevails?

1. If you should ask the reasons why so ardent a desire for success should be entertained, I should have only to reiterate what I have already, and perhaps repeatedly, stated, as to the unspeakable value of the souls of men, and the intimate manner in which their salvation stands connected with the glory of God and the recompense of the Redeemer. It is by presenting motives drawn from these topics that I have endeavoured to urge you to labour. I have besought you to be active because the object is so eminently worthy of your desire. If you have undertaken such labours at all, it ought to have been, and I trust it has been, under the influence of these considerations; and, if this has been the case, it may be most justly expected that you should desire the object as well as labour for it. The reasons which have operated upon you are directly adapted to kindle desire, and it is only by doing so that they can be imagined to lead to exertion. If, for example, you have been actuated by a sense of compassion for souls; if you have felt their unutterable value and yearned over their coming miseries, and have thus been led to instruct the ignorant and to warn the reprobate; how is it that you stop at this point, and that your feelings are not carried forward to their actual conversion? Is there anything in their merely being warned and instructed which so much better their condition that your compassion can be satisfied with it? If, indeed, they listen to instruction, and by it are induced to flee from the wrath to come, then is your gratification reasonable; but, if they do not, but, on the contrary, continue impenitent in sin, they are still, as in the first instance, in the way to ruin, and making an equal demand upon your pity. Nay, they make now a much larger demand upon your pity; for their condition is much worse than it was before, seeing they have anew hated instruction and despised reproof. Your very words of warning are, by their perverseness, turned into an aggravation of their guilt and wretchedness; if, therefore,

you ever pitied them, your pity ought now to be more tender than ever, nor can you find anything reasonably to allay it short of their actual salvation.

Or, if you have undertaken endeavours for the conversion of sinners because your heart burned within you for the honour of God, whose name was daily blasphemed and his commands trampled on in your presence; if you have rebuked the ungodly because, as the friend of God, you felt a holy indignation against his enemies, and a longing desire to reduce them to submission before him; from this state of mind it might equally have been expected that you would have been content with nothing short of such an actual result. To see the enemies of God still insulting him, and the hand of rebellion perseveringly lifted up notwithstanding your interposition, is surely adapted, not merely to keep the fire of your indignation burning, but to raise it to a higher flame, inasmuch as the dishonour done to your Maker is thus grievously augmented.

Or, finally, if you have been animated by love to the Saviour, and have striven for the good of sinners because you longed that he might be recompensed for his dying pains, and enjoy the fruit of the travail of his soul, this feeling would naturally bear you on to the completion of your object. While those to whom you are imparting instruction refuse it you are gaining nothing for your Lord. It is only by the actual turning of sinners unto him that you make any contribution to his joy. If your advocacy on his behalf is repelled, he in your person is being wounded afresh, and put to additional shame.

When you consider, therefore, the nature and tendency of these impulses to your labour, you will perceive how justly it may be expected that your desires should go eagerly forward, and stop nowhere short of the actual conversion of those whom you instruct.

2. The fact that you have laboured for the conversion of sinners renders it additionally reasonable that you should desire it. Whenever we bestow pains upon an object, it not only indicates that we had a desire for it in the first instance, but it tends to increase the ardour of that desire. No man likes to lose his labour, or to fail of obtaining an object to which his efforts have been applied. The husbandman does not cultivate his ground for the mere sake of

labouring, but for the sake of the crop which his toil is to produce; neither does the merchant buy and sell for the mere sake of traffic, but of the gain which is to be acquired by his merchandise: and we know that the attention of such persons is eagerly directed to their respective recompense. It would be the same with ourselves in carnal things, and why is it not to be so in spiritual things? Is it when we exert ourselves for the souls of men, and only then, that we are content to labour for the mere sake of labouring, and that, after expending our best resources, we look for no return?

The very supposition that we do not feel an ardent desire for the actual conversion of sinners under our instrumentality, involves inconsistencies of the most striking and the most painful kind, even if it does not bring into suspicion the motives by which we have been actuated. Have we, or have we not, melted with pity for men, glowed for the honour of God, and panted for the recompense of the Saviour? If we have not, why have we sought the salvation of souls? If we have, why do we not fix upon its actual accomplishment with more intense desire? Why are we in so great a measure lukewarm as to the attainment of the object we profess to have been seeking? If we do not desire it why have we laboured? If we have felt enough to impel us to labour, whence the final languishing of our desire? It is probable that these perplexities must be unravelled by admitting, on the one hand, that these holy motives have not actuated us so extensively as they ought, and, on the other, that their influence is afflictively transient. But let us see that this influence is revived and extended. Let us set the souls of men fairly before us, and by steady contemplation realize their intrinsic value, as well as the connexion of their salvation with the glory of God and the recompense of the Redeemer. Let us keep still in view the object for which we have been labouring; let us cherish an anxious inquiry after the fruit of our toil; let us follow our instructions with ardent longings for success; and never cease to watch the seed we have sown while any hope of its fruitfulness remains.

II. Secondly, in our endeavours for the conversion of sinners *success may be cheerfully expected.*

I do not say this in ignorance of the pride and enmity of

the heart of man, or in any fond imagination that the tidings of reconciliation will be spontaneously welcomed by the enemies of God. I know that the heart is desperately wicked; but I know too that the power of God will be employed for its transformation, even that mighty power whereby he raised Christ from the dead, and whereby he is able also to subdue all things unto himself.

Pious persons not unfrequently take a more discouraging view of the usefulness of religious exertions than appears to me either scriptural, or reasonable. It seems to be doubted by many whether any considerable or satisfactory results can be relied on, and even to be set down almost as an axiom that, in the present age, Christians are appointed to a course of labour, not indeed totally, but in a great measure, unsuccessful. In confirmation of such an opinion experience is often appealed to, and instances of unfruitfulness and disappointment, of which no doubt many can be cited, adduced, as forbidding the expectation of general or extensive effects. Now I know that in times past success has not attended every effort for God, and that it would be vain to rely upon it with any particularity or uniformity in time to come; I am willing also to make the largest allowances that can reasonably be demanded on the score of unsuccessful exertion; and yet I am ready to maintain that, in a general view, success may cheerfully be expected. The material point between those who form a more or less encouraging idea of the results to be anticipated from the use of religious means, is to ascertain the extent to which God himself has authorized the expectation of success. So far as we are warranted by Scripture to expect it it is clearly reasonable to go, and no farther. Let us enter briefly into this inquiry.

No one can imagine for a moment that the Scripture authorizes us to expect the success of all endeavours made for the salvation of men; or even that of any one particular effort, singled out from the rest. Some exertions will fail, and any exertion may fail; but all will not fail. How many, or what proportion, will succeed? When we refer to the language of promise, we find it, however encouraging, still indeterminate; our labour shall not be in vain, but we know not which of our efforts shall prosper: yet the general aspect of the promises is clearly adapted to sanction the conclusion that success will be the rule, and failure the exception. We

may approach nearer to some definite idea, however, by observing that the language of the inspired writers indicates and establishes an analogy between the results of exertion in the natural and the spiritual worlds. "They that sow shall reap. What a man soweth that shall he also reap. He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly. One planteth, another watereth, but God giveth the increase." Such is the language of the sacred penmen; language in which there could be no propriety if there were not an analogy between the natural and the spiritual worlds, as to the relation between activity exerted and effects produced. If our endeavours for the conversion of sinners may be represented as the sowing of seed, the fruits of those endeavours, it appears, may be compared to those which reward the labours of the husbandman; they are as certain, and they will be as copious.

The analogy thus presented to us will be found applicable to the subject in all its aspects. It makes allowance for failures; since it is very well known that, of the millions of seeds scattered by the hand of the husbandman, no inconsiderable number never vegetate, and that of those which grow many do not become fruitful; besides which, there are blighted ears and blasted fields, there are seasons of scarcity and years of famine. These are the representatives of our unsuccessful operations; and, certainly, no small measure of unrequited toil may be considered as fairly represented by these particulars. But look at the other part of the analogy. The toils of agriculture taken as a whole are not unrecompensed, but satisfactorily and most bountifully rewarded. The perished seeds, the blighted ears, the blasted fields, the defective crops, never amount to the destruction of the harvest, nor entail ruin on the husbandman; on the contrary, they are lost in the general productiveness of the earth, and forgotten amidst the plenty and the joy of the harvest-home. Such, then, we are authorized to believe, will infallibly be the results of labours for the souls of men. We shall have some failures, but more successes; we shall behold too many spots of barrenness, but we shall see a general fertility; some seed will perish and some green ears be blighted, but those who sow shall reap; and he that hath gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless return again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. On the whole, therefore, the success attending labours for God will be not only satisfac-

tory, but abundant. It is too little to say that it will be enough to recompense the expenditure; it will be sufficient to inspire a grateful and overflowing joy, like the joy of harvest.

While this analogy presents a most cheering and animating prospect, it has a further advantage, namely, that it leads to no extravagant or overstrained expectation. While, according to the rule laid down, we shall be expecting enough to fill us with unutterable joy, we shall at the same time be expecting no more than is ordinarily realized in other species of labour. We shall be observing, and not violating, the general principles of providential administration; not anticipating for our labour any peculiar and surprising efficacy, but merely the common lot of well-directed effort. There can be little hazard in indulging such an expectation. The wonder would be, not that it should be realized, but that it should be disappointed.

1. In confirmation of this line of sentiment, it may be observed, in the first place, that the connexion of labour with proportionate success is a constant feature of the divine government. In whatever case God has commanded men to labour, he has secured a recompense for their toil. When he enjoined the cultivation of the earth on our fallen parents, his language was, "In the sweat of thy brow *thou shalt eat bread:*" and, in whatever cases he has suffered such circumstances to exist as have induced men to labour, he has likewise provided for a happy issue of their exertions. In truth, he has so constituted us that we regard a prospect of success as essential to rational exertion, and that we feel a high probability, but, above all, a certainty, of failure a constraining motive to the abandonment of our toil. He neither induces nor expects us to spend our strength on what cannot be acquired. And as this is his uniform rule in natural things, so there is no reason to suppose that he has adopted a different rule in spiritual things. When, therefore, we find that he not only permits the aspect of the world around us to be such as is fitted to awaken our compassion and impel us to exertion, but that he himself engages us to it, not only by inducements of love, but by the voice of authority, with how much justice may we conclude that he proceeds upon the usual principle of his government, and means to requite the labours he impels. As he has given

no intimation of an exception in this case, we clearly can have no ground to imagine one; and to this it may certainly be added, that in this case least of all it might be expected that an exception would be made. If the natural husbandman is secure of his harvest, still more may we believe that the same recompense awaits the spiritual husbandman, who sows more precious seed, and looks for a more valuable crop.

2. It is deserving of notice, in the second place, that in religious efforts the means are eminently adapted to the end. The success of all measures is naturally proportioned to their adaptation to the end designed; and in any case in which it might appear that this adaptation was defective, an equal deficiency might justly be apprehended in the result. We are quite willing to allow the force of this argument in the instance of religion. If it should appear that the means employed for its diffusion are but imperfectly adapted to that purpose, that they are little fitted to enlighten, to convince, and to persuade, let our anticipations of success be reduced accordingly. On this point hear the language of the apostle in the text. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." He is here expressing, not a sentiment of regret, but of gratulation. When he says, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," he is not lamenting the absence of kingly patronage, of a richly-endowed establishment, of posts of honour, or of secular emoluments, by which men might be induced to assume the profession of Christianity, or to defend it; he is rather rejoicing in the separation of the Gospel from such powerless engines, and triumphing in the reflection that he was working with better adapted means. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." Happily, we are not operating in methods which could only tend to make men hypocrites instead of Christians, and so to render our apparent success but a disguise for our real defeat. We bring into the field a more effective artillery. We have truths which make the understanding full of light, which take a fast hold upon the conscience, which present moving appeals to the heart; we have all that earth, or heaven, or hell, can contribute to influence mankind; and these weapons are too well fitted to their work to be applied in vain, they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. The Holy Scriptures are able to make men wise unto sal-

vation; and, where the instrument employed discovers so eminent an adaptation to the end, it would be contrary to all rule not to anticipate a proportionate effect.

3. To these topics may be added, in the third place, a reference to the specific promises with which the sacred Word abounds. The call to labour is never separated from some annunciation of success. "They that sow shall reap." Even the uncertainty allowed to be attendant upon labour is used as an argument to diligence. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not which shall prosper, this or that, or whether both shall be alike good." The louder the call to activity the stronger is the assertion of its recompense. "Wherefore be ye steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." The very discouragement to which the labourer is liable is most graciously met and relieved by the declaration, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless return again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Upon what principle could the oracles of truth present to us such passages as these, if a proportionate and ample success were not secured to our endeavours? If labour for God were to issue in the melancholy and cheerless blank which our fears sometimes picture to us, is it possible that a God of kindness and of truth would have thrown such brilliant lights on the path of labour itself, and thus have cherished a fallacious expectation, by which final disappointment would be rendered more bitter and overwhelming?

4. In confirmation of our general principle, we may appeal, in the last place, to the testimony of history; for, with whatever instances of unsuccessful labour we may be met, we are convinced that the voice of history on the whole is decidedly in our favour. To as great an extent, and with as much certainty, as the tilling of the ground renders it productive, does the cultivation of the moral waste render it fruitful in righteousness. Never, on the one hand, has there been a time of drowsiness and inaction in which the Gospel chariot did not slacken its pace, or suspend its progress; and seldom, on the other, has there been a season of wakefulness and energy without a measure of enlargement and prosperity. We allow exceptions, but we are sure all history testifies that

this is the rule. Now, even a doubtful principle is admitted to be established when it has been tried by the test of experience, and found to hold good; if, therefore, in the first instance there could have been any doubt as to the success of our labours for God, at length these doubts should be given to the wind. The principles of the divine government and the promises of divine love have been too long tried, and too often found faithful, to be called in question almost at the end of the world. If they were to be questioned at all, it should have been in earlier ages, in the protracted darkness of popish idolatry, or amidst the fury of pagan persecution; but it must not be now, when our difficulties are less, when our prospects are brighter, when we are visibly nearer the glorious consummation, and when all past ages are lifting up their voice to cheer us on to the final assault of the kingdom of darkness.

Whatever difficulties your own separate experience may present to you, therefore, dear brethren, set it down as an incontrovertible maxim that labour for God shall not be in vain. Neither, on the whole, shall your own be so. Chide an unbelieving heart, and maintain a quarrel with a desponding spirit. Not only let your desires extend themselves, but let them be consolidated into expectations. Do not allow yourselves to think that no good will be done. Cherish a belief, on the contrary, that much good will be done, though you know not when, nor how, nor to what extent; and that good enough will be done to recompense you for your trouble, and to give you a part in the joy of the harvest-home.

III. Thirdly, in our endeavours for the conversion of sinners *success should be justly estimated*.

I have been leading you, in the former part of this discourse, to estimate it highly; and it might not unnaturally seem that it could not be estimated too highly. Neither can it be so, when viewed in itself; but it requires to be viewed in connexion with another object, by the influence of which our appreciation of it must be modified. This second object is *the glory of God*,—an object to which the conversion of sinners bears an intimate relation. Now it is plainly incumbent on the friends of God to desire both the glory of his name and the conversion of sinners; but the glory of God should be primary, and the conversion of sinners subordinate. We desire the latter much, but the former more.

1. That this should be the case will appear, if we consider that the glory of God is essentially the first and most important of all objects. He is the Creator; all besides are creatures, and as such infinitely inferior to him. He is the fountain of all blessedness, the universal sovereign; and his glory is of more importance to the universe than any other consideration. Hence, therefore, in every rightly-disposed mind, it ought to be, and will be, the first object of regard, taking precedence of all others, however interesting and important any others may be. With reference to the conversion of sinners it may be justly said, that it is of more consequence that God should be glorified than that any sinner, or that all sinners, should be saved.

2. In the scope of human duty, likewise, the Creator stands before the creature. We are to love the Lord our God with our highest affection, and our neighbour only with that secondary regard which we are authorized to fix upon ourselves. The withdrawalment of our supreme regard from our Maker is the essential character of iniquity, and the restoration of it eminently pertains to the reconciliation of a sinner to God. As every Christian would prefer his Maker to himself, so will he prefer his Maker equally to his fellow-creatures; and he will consequently estimate even the salvation of men, however highly, still in subordination to the glory of God.

3. In truth, this subordination is manifest from the fact, that the conversion of sinners is to be desired in order that God may be glorified thereby. This is one of the main reasons why every friend of God is called upon to labour for it. It is therefore obvious that, in this very work, the glory of God is the chief end, and the conversion of sinners the subordinate one. Though valuable for its own sake, it is not for its own sake alone that a Christian pursues it; but because it is conducive to an end yet more valuable, namely, the glory of God our Saviour.

Having established the sentiment that the conversion of sinners ought to be estimated subordinately to the glory of God, I may be asked, perhaps, to what end I have done so, and whether the glory of God is not identified with the conversion of sinners. Now there is no question but the conversion of sinners is in all cases to the glory of God; but it requires to be observed that, when sinners are not con-

verted, God may be glorified still. If they listen to instruction and bow to reproof, this renders honour to the Lord; and if they harden their neck and perish in their sin, still will the Lord get himself honour upon them, if not as a merciful Saviour, yet as a righteous Judge. The honour of God is not suspended upon the penitence of the rebellious. By their submission he would be honoured in one way, by their obduracy he will be honoured in another; but in every case he will be glorified.

If it should be apprehended that the effect of this sentiment might be to harden the heart against sinners, and to render us less concerned for their salvation, there are not wanting means of obviating such an inference. It might be observed, that the view we have taken diminishes nothing of the value of salvation itself. To whatever extent God may be glorified in a sinner if impenitent, his state of guilt and misery loses none of its afflictiveness; still it is as dreadful a thing for him to be subject to eternal wrath, and as urgently as ever are we impelled by all motives of compassion to snatch him as a brand out of the fire. It is an undoubted truth that God will be glorified by the ways of his providence, although the distresses of the afflicted should not be relieved; but no benevolent man allows himself, on this account, to look upon the woes of his species with indifference. Any person who should make such a use of the sentiment would stand convicted of a callous and unfeeling heart. It is the same in temporal and in spiritual things. The man who can look on unmoved while sinners perish, because God will be glorified in them whether they are saved or lost, is manifestly destitute of spiritual feeling. He takes ground on which no motive can ever reach him. He will do nothing until he sees that God's glory is absolutely suspended upon the issue! Then, verily, he may resign himself to eternal sloth; for *that* will never be.

It may, in like manner, be observed of all the other motives which impel us to exertion for the salvation of men, that the security of the divine glory in no degree destroys their applicability, or diminishes their force. Our minds may, and should, be yielded to the influence of pity for men, of love to Christ, and of call to duty, as freely and as fully as though the glory of God were altogether out of the question. This may be to us a refuge from disappointment, but

it can never be justly or consistently made a screen from obligation. Besides, a regard to the glory of God still combines its impelling power with that of the other motives employed. For, though God may be so glorified by the course of his administration towards impenitent sinners as to be complacent in its issue, although they perish; yet the glory brought to his name by those who repent, and are saved, ought in every case to be most strongly preferred *by us*, and most ardently sought. When, at the last day, we behold the final destruction of the impenitent, we may, and doubtless shall, be enabled to acquiesce—may I say to rejoice?—therein, and to say, “So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord:” but as yet there is too much of human tenderness about us to fit us for such a scene. Happy as we may be in the thought that, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, God will be glorified, it were not only unchristian, but unnatural and inhuman, if we were not ardently to wish that his glory might be won in the way of mercy, rather than of vengeance. The glories of God’s vengeance, even at the last, when we shall be much better fitted for contemplating them than we are now, will be awful, and demand a solemn acquiescence; the glories of his grace will afford us matter of triumphant joy and everlasting praise. These are the glories which it is ours to win for him; those of his wrath he will accomplish for himself.

The primary character of the divine glory, however, though it does not impair our motives to exertion, has an important bearing both on cases of failure and success. When our labour has had a blessed issue, and we have been instrumental in turning a sinner to God, we shall thus be led to recollect that there is an ulterior object to which this success is conducive, and for the sake of which we have sought it; while, amidst baffled efforts and defeated exertions, it will afford us the consolation of knowing that one valuable end has been answered by our labours, although that at which we more immediately aimed has not been accomplished. The bearings of this sentiment, however, are too extensive to be entered upon here; and we shall have occasion to recur to it in the two lectures which remain.

LECTURE XI.

SUCCESS WANTING.

“Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”—*Isaiah liii. 1.*

AND is this really the language, dear brethren, with which you are obliged to return from your attacks on the kingdom of darkness, after having gone forth to them as on the Lord's side, and having been encouraged by the assurance that the weapons of your warfare, being not carnal but spiritual, should be mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds? Are you constrained to return discomfited? Are the persons still ignorant whom you have been striving to enlighten; are those still obdurate whom you have been trying to subdue; and those still perishing whom you have been endeavouring to save? Surveying the field in which you have laboured, have you to say, with the lamenting prophet, that none have believed your report, and that the arm of the Lord hath not been revealed? I would fain hope that this is not the case with you all, nor altogether the case with any of you; but it is probably so to a sufficient extent to render appropriate and beneficial the consideration we may now bestow upon such a state of things.

I begin, then, dear brethren, by expressing sympathy in your grief. For, of course, it is to you a source of grief: unquestionably so, where those whose salvation you seek are the objects of your tender affection, and their welfare ever present and ever dear to you; but I trust not in these instances alone. You labour for the conversion of some who are not bound to you by any other ties than those of a common nature and a common ruin; and, if among these your efforts are unsuccessful, it may well be a matter of sorrow. In the first place, here is labour lost. You have devoted a portion of time and bodily strength, some exercises of mind and efforts of heart, with, perhaps, some difficulty or sacrifice, to an object which, after all, you have not attained. You would feel disappointed and chagrined if you had exerted yourself for any earthly object, and had not succeeded; how much more tenderly should you bewail a failure in one that

is spiritual and eternal? In the next place, your labour is without one of the most natural and satisfactory tokens of your Heavenly Father's acceptance. To him you have presented it, and you look for its fruitfulness as the token of his blessing; but, while no such result appears, you have ground for apprehension that your services are not acceptable, that the Lord is not pleased to employ you for good, but rather that he throws you aside as a vessel in which he has no pleasure. In addition to these considerations which refer to yourselves, are some of a more generous kind. You see, for example, that the spiritual wretchedness of men continues notwithstanding all your efforts to relieve it. Still are they blind and carnal, profligate and stubborn, guilty and undone; still are they beneath God's anger, and on the brink of perdition. These things you felt so strongly in the first instance that they impelled you, in part, to the efforts you have made; how naturally, then, should you bewail them now, seeing that they have lost none of their force, but are rather aggravated by continuance, and much more so by the rejection or the neglect of your kind endeavours. You see, too, what perpetual dishonour is done to God. Still his name is blasphemed, his glory disregarded, his law trampled on, his mercy despised; and can you, as a friend of God, look upon such a scene, and not glow with a holy indignation for his name? What can be more natural than that you should feel and say, with the Psalmist, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes because men keep not thy law"?

If topics so justly adapted to move your feelings do not move them, depend upon it that something is wrong. Either you never did cherish a right temper in this respect, or there is come over you a spiritual callousness rendering you insensible to what you once felt, or the just excitement of feeling is prevented by the influence of some erroneous notions or misapplied truths. Beware especially of this last source of mischief. Do not suffer your feelings to be blunted in regard to the spiritual wretchedness of sinners because you are become familiar with it, or because your efforts have been met with lightness, resentment, or ingratitude, or because it may seem of no use to make any further exertion, or because God must work, and he will work his pleasure, and save his elect. None of these considerations, whatever truth there may be in them, alter the sorrowful facts that the objects of

your unsuccessful labour are still in sin and misery, at once dishonouring God and ruining themselves, while your fruitless labours have only given them more instructions to despise, and assistance in accumulating greater guilt. That they are obdurate and insensible makes their case but the more melancholy. You would not become indifferent to temporal distress on any such grounds as those just mentioned; and there is no point in which you should treat spiritual otherwise than temporal wretchedness, except that your feelings should be much more intense.

If your want of success is to you a matter of grief, dear brethren, allow us to say that we sympathize with you in that sorrow. It is a just, a holy, a generous sorrow, and it may well be ample. But sympathy is not all that we offer you; we proceed to address to you some considerations by which your feelings may be regulated, and turned to advantage.

I. And, first, we may observe, that your judgment respecting your success is probably, and almost certainly, fallacious. It may seem to you, indeed, so far as you can judge, that your labours have been unsuccessful; but *how can you judge?* There are two grounds on which it may be made plain that we cannot, at present, form anything like an accurate conclusion on such a subject.

The first is, that, even if everything were known to us, it is much too soon for any judgment to be formed. Upon the supposition that no good effect has resulted hitherto from anything that we have done, no proof whatever arises that benefit will not accrue hereafter. The time during which the instructions we have given may operate to produce conviction and conversion is not yet terminated, so that calculation is quite set at defiance. As seed may lie buried long in the dust and yet ultimately vegetate, so knowledge communicated and disregarded now may have decisive influence hereafter, when, perhaps, poverty, or sickness, or some other circumstance, shall induce reflection upon it. To this it may be added that your opportunity for exertion is not yet past; so that, if what you have already done be not of itself effectual, it may become so in combination with what you may hereafter do, and may have prepared the way for successes which are at hand. I am not now concerned to show that you *will* have success, only that it is impossible for you to say you will *not*. The harvest is not yet; nor

can you by any possibility, at least not without the gift of inspiration (to which I suppose you do not pretend), tell in the seed-time what the harvest will be.

In the next place, we are far from knowing everything which has already occurred. Some of those for whose good we have laboured incidentally—as by the distribution of tracts on the way-side, for example—are not within our observation at all, so that, if any good is done by such means, we are never likely to know it till the day of God; others may be withdrawn from our instructions before any effect appears, so that the benefit imparted to them likewise may be unknown. And it is but a very imperfect judgment we can form even of those who are under our continual inspection. There is something in the commencement of piety often dubious, or studiously concealed; and, while we are lamenting what we conceive to be cases of hopeless obduracy, He who seeth in secret, and penetrates the heart, may be saying, “Surely I have seen Ephraim bemoaning himself.” In a word, it is obvious that none of us can tell what the influence of our endeavours actually is, and it is strange that we should ever pretend to do so. It would seem as though we assumed the attribute of omniscience for this purpose, and imagined ourselves to be upon an elevation where none but our Maker ever sits. We may not know that we have had success; but we can never be entitled to affirm that we have had none until the arrival of the final day, when for the first time the volume of providential history will be laid open to our view. Keep aloof, therefore, dear brethren, from such a disconsolate and groundless conclusion. It is always the language either of ignorance or of precipitancy. Be patient: your harvest may yet be abundant enough to put your murmurs to shame.

Instead of your actually having no success, your case only amounts to this, that the result of your labours is at present partly concealed. It is not only inevitable that it should be so, but it is wise, and you should here perceive an occasion for the discipline of your heart. You are not, it seems, to identify your impulses to labour too closely with your actual successes. You must be willing to work from principle, rather than for gratification; you must learn to look at some other objects besides the results of your exertions; you must know whence to derive influences independent of them;

and, in so far as success may be allotted to you, you must be content to wait for the knowledge of it till a period when it can be more safely and advantageously given. Though you may have thus far to labour in darkness, your toil is surely sufficiently cheered by the promises of a faithful and gracious God to authorize and encourage you to proceed.

2. But I am willing to accept your own statement, and to suppose that your success is quite as small as you imagine it to be. No man hath believed your report, or yielded to your persuasion. I ask, What then? You say, probably, "The arm of the Lord hath not been revealed: he has not granted a blessing to my labours." Doubtless, this may have been the case; but it is needful for you to pause and to consider before you conclude it to have been so. Another cause *may* have existed, and one of a very different kind.

Make it a matter of serious examination whether your exertions have been such as to authorize the expectation of success. Defects and improprieties may have attended them which will sufficiently account for their inefficiency, without attributing it to the absence of the divine blessing.

It is worth your while to inquire whether you have made any real effort for the conversion of sinners at all. Much may go under this name, and wear this general aspect, which very little deserves to be so considered. You may be a teacher in a Sunday school, for example, and say almost nothing adapted to awaken pious emotion; or you may be a visitor of a Christian Instruction Society, or otherwise may make visits apparently and professedly of a religious character, and suffer your discourse to turn principally or entirely upon inferior subjects. Now, to whatever extent this may have been the case, it is plain that you have not been *trying* to convert sinners, and it can be no wonder that you have not succeeded. This is sowing, not wheat, but chaff, and can never produce a harvest.

Inquire further, whether, when you have striven to save a soul, you have used the divinely-adapted and appointed means. This only means is the Word of God, which throws light into the understanding, and makes its appeal to the conscience and to the heart upon spiritual grounds. But, in efforts for religious usefulness, it is too often the case that an appeal is directly or incidentally made to a sense of temporal interest. The relief of present necessities, to which a

religious call not unnaturally leads, may be made, in whole or in part, the motive which is brought to bear on persons as the reason why we expect them either to listen to us, or to attend a prayer-meeting in the neighbourhood, or to make their appearance at the house of God. However likely this method of bringing people *under the means*, as it is called, may be to do them good, the application of worldly motive is much more likely to do them harm, and it is clearly a proceeding upon which God can never be expected to smile.

Inquire again, whether, if you have used the right means, you have used them in a proper manner. In speaking for God, have you spoken of him the thing that is right, and presented his truth to the understanding of men in its simplicity and purity? Have you, according to the Scriptures, made clear the grounds of duty, the nature and evil of sin, the righteousness of God's anger, and the method of fleeing from the wrath to come? Or have your instructions been defective, inconsistent, or obscure? Have you brought forward the body of motives which the Bible contains, exhibiting each in its due force and proportion? Or have you suffered the artillery of heaven to sleep, without uttering its voices either of terror or of love? And, withal, how much of solemnity, faithfulness, and tenderness, have you carried into the work? Have you always spoken of salvation as though you thought it of infinite moment? Have you shown so much tenderness that a sinner could not justly be angry, and yet such resolved fidelity that his conscience could not evade your attack? You cannot but know how much of the adaptation of your endeavours to the end designed is involved in these things. No wisdom can be expected to result from obscure and defective instruction, no impression from a slender exhibition of motives, no efficiency from harsh or timid appeals; and, in whatever measure we may have been wanting in skill or energy in the use of our weapon, it can excite no surprise that we have been unsuccessful in the war.

Inquire, lastly, whether your labours have been conducted in a right spirit towards God. You know the maxim of his government, "Them that honour me I will honour." Can your efforts bear the application of this rule? Have you gone forth under a deep sense of your own insufficiency and helplessness, and with an earnest supplication for his presence

and blessing? Have you devoutly acknowledged the necessity and excellence of the Holy Spirit's influence, and rendered due honour to his gracious agency? What has been your leading aim and impelling motive? Has it been your first and ardent desire to glorify God by bearing a testimony for him in his controversy with a rebellious world, and thus striving to reconcile sinners to him? Have you gone with a simplicity of motive, and a cleanliness of heart, which the heart-searching God could regard with approbation? If on such points as these we have been defective; if even the opposite evils have had place within us; if we have been induced by human entreaty, or have regarded human approbation; if we have indulged a spirit of self-sufficiency or self-exaltation; these things are calculated to act like mildew on the seed we have sown, and to blast all our expectations of its fruitfulness.

I hope that, in the course of such an examination, we shall not find uniform and unmingled evil; but, on the contrary, something of well-principled and well-adapted labour, for which to be both thankful and hopeful. Yet which of us in these respects is without sin? Which of us may not readily discover sin enough in all these respects to teach us how undeserving we are of success, and to make us acknowledge the forgiving grace of the Lord whom we serve if any blessing be granted to our toil? When we think what means should be employed for the conversion of sinners, in what manner and in what spirit, we may find causes enough why *we* have not been successful without ascribing it to the sovereignty of God. We should think it altogether strange and unwarrantable, if a husbandman who had neither carefully ploughed his fields, nor sowed clean seed, were to say when he beheld his failing crop, "The Lord has not blessed me this year." The Lord has not blessed him! He should much rather confess that he has been wanting in that reasonable industry and skill which the cultivation of the soil requires. In like manner we, when we look on the spiritual barrenness of our field of labour, must beware how we ask, Why hath the Lord withheld his benediction; and must reflect with how much more justice we may inquire why we have shown no more holiness, vigour, and wisdom. To how great an extent will it be incumbent upon us to acquit our Master, and to condemn ourselves!

3. Perhaps, however, after the most serious examination, you may be ready to hope that your labours have contained something on which your Heavenly Father might smile; something, through grace, of a sincere dedication to his glory, and of an humble, however imperfect, employment of his word in his own strength; and yet you do not see the blessing you have hoped for on your toil. Conclude, then, that the Lord has been pleased to withhold from you his blessing, and observe the lights in which this state of things may be regarded.

It is to be considered, undoubtedly, as an act of that holy, wise, and gracious sovereignty, which the Most High is continually exercising in the administration of his affairs. You would not for a moment deny that he is entitled to such a sovereignty, or imagine that he can make an improper use of it. You know that he is infinitely exalted, and possessed of unquestionable right an absolute supremacy, doing according to his pleasure among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. This divine sovereignty, of course, affects your affairs, as it does those of all other creatures; and, however an enemy to God might rebel against it, this is not what is expected from a friend. You are in the habit of acknowledging the sovereignty of God in your temporal affairs, and, when they are not conformable to your wishes, you say submissively, The will of the Lord be done; and why should you not cultivate a similar temper as to what may really be the will of the Lord in reference to the conversion of sinners by your instrumentality? What would you think of any husbandman who, in a bad season, should petulantly exclaim, "I have carefully tilled the ground, and why have I not a crop"? You will be long, I trust, before you exemplify in your own person such a spirit of absurd and sinful self-importance.

You will scarcely imagine that, in the sovereignty thus exercised towards you, there is anything inconsistent with the promises on which you had established your hope. The promises of God are general, and so likewise is their fulfilment. There is a promise—an hitherto unbroken promise—of a harvest; but always some seeds perish, some ears are blighted, and some fields are barren. In sowing seeds of truth there is likewise a portion of unsuccessfulness. Now this must be allotted somewhere; and what if a measure of

it is allotted to you? Will you therefore be ready to complain, as though nothing could satisfy you but an exemption from the common lot of partial disappointment?

Neither will you conceive, I trust, that in this respect the Lord deals with you unkindly. You will at least have no reason to think so. If you look through the history of his ways, you will find that many of his most honoured servants have partaken of similar discipline. What but unsuccessful was the ministry of Enoch and of Noah, of Elijah and Elisha? You have heard the lamentations of Jeremiah; and, if you have to say, Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed, Isaiah said it before you. Similar treatment fell to the lot even of your Lord himself, than whom no minister was surely better entitled to expect success, while none was ever more unsuccessful. Now the servant is not above his Lord: it is enough, and should be enough even for you, that the servant be *as* his Lord.

You tremble, perhaps, for the cause of God, which you have desired to see prospering in your hands. But you need not do this. Your individual exertions constitute but a small fraction of the agency which is employed for the advancement of his kingdom, and is far too insignificant to affect materially the general result, whatever may be the measure of its success. The blasting of a single field does not sensibly affect the harvest. The resources of the Almighty are sufficiently ample to secure the accomplishment of his purposes, and the fulfilment of his promises too, whatever toils may be fruitless and unrewarded. Though *your* efforts may be abortive, his word shall not return unto him void, but shall accomplish that which he pleases, and prosper in the thing whereto he hath sent it.

Nor suffer yourself to imagine for a moment that anything is really lost. If instruction and exhortation be not effectual to the conversion of the sinner, there is another purpose to which they are effectual, and one which it is worth while to accomplish, even by itself. It is conducive to the glory of God, since it carries into operation that system of equitable and merciful probation which he has established in his government of mankind, and by the result of which, alike in the penitent and the impenitent, he will be eminently glorified. It is on this ground that, infinitely

benevolent as he is, God himself submits to the obstinacy of the wicked, and suffers it to be perpetuated; and an end which gains his acquiescence may well induce ours. If sinners do not obey, we still bear a testimony for God, and not only uphold his rights and honours in the world now, but prepare for their fuller and more glorious manifestation hereafter.

You may take even a further consolation. Not only shall an excellent purpose be answered by your labours, though unsuccessful in the conversion of sinners, but a better purpose than though success had been granted you. If there be any difficulty in making this clear in fact, we can have no hesitation in inferring it from the known and unquestionable character of the divine ways. God is of infinite wisdom. His sovereignty itself is wise. The ends which he brings to pass are, on the whole, the very best which could be attained. If any desirable end is passed by or frustrated, it is only that one more desirable may be secured. In this view it may be truly affirmed that there is no failure, and no unsuccessfulness. And, if he who knows all things, and sees all things as they really are, sees it good that an object should be produced by our labours differing somewhat from that which we have contemplated, a firm ground is laid for our acquiescence in his will.

And we who labour shall not lose our reward. We may lose, indeed, what it would be unspeakably delightful to attain, namely, the rescue of sinners from the wrath to come; but still we shall gain something, even an appropriate and blessed recompense. We shall be a sweet savour unto God, both in them that believe and in them that perish. The labours which are rendered to him will be graciously accepted by him, and be more than recompensed by his present and future approbation. This is not only a high reward, but the highest reward possible; that upon which our desires should be chiefly fixed, and which in all events is sure. Suppose there were to be no other, and that the gratification arising from the actual salvation of sinners were to be wholly withheld from us, this ought to be more than enough to animate and to sweeten our toil.

4. I observe further, that, from whatever cause your want of success may have arisen, it is adapted to yield you instruction and benefit which it should be your earnest endeavour to secure.

If, for example, you feel yourself justified in referring it to God's sovereign pleasure, you will find occasion for corresponding exercises of mind. It is probable that you feel somewhat of disappointment and mortification, akin perhaps to the feeling of Jonah when he sat waiting, not, indeed, for the salvation of Nineveh, but for its destruction. You may be tempted, like him, to say that you do well to be angry; but, as in the case of the ancient prophet, the Lord means to teach you otherwise. Here is something of self-will and self-importance to be brought down. You must learn that the glory of the Creator is far more than the gratification, and even than the salvation, of the creature. You must learn to blend ardent desire with silent submission, and to resign without a murmur an object for which you have striven with your utmost ardour. It is the Lord, and not you, whose will is to be done.

You may thus learn, too, upon what object your heart should be chiefly set. It should, of course, be that which is most secure, and which exposes you to no risk of disappointment. Now this is the glory of God as promoted by your labours, rather than the salvation of men. The latter we may *hope* to attain; of the former we may in all cases be *certain*. By such a dispensation God attaches to it the highest value as a matter of practical pursuit. And herein, in truth, our hearts need discipline. We are too apt either to confine our view to the salvation of men, overlooking entirely the glory of God, or to attach to it a disproportionate value. Let our disappointments rectify this evil; and, without at all diminishing our desire for the salvation of men, for which we do not yet long with sufficient ardour, let them teach us that we ought to contemplate another as our chief end, and that in its prosecution we shall have a certain reward.

The benefit of our learning these lessons effectually will not be confined to our personal experience, it will extend also to our work. It is when we are annihilated before God that he may begin to exalt us; when we have learned to acquiesce in his will he may grant us our own; when we come to seek first his glory he may afford us more extensively the salvation of men. A high bounty is thus attached to our growth in spiritual wisdom, and to our right interpretation of God's dispensations. Let us remember that there is some-

thing more to be done with them than to *bear* them, whether with or without repining; we have to *improve* them, and in this method we shall be well repaid for our trouble.

If, on the other hand, we find reason to conclude that our want of success arises from our own defects, it is obvious that this is a loud call to humiliation and diligence.

It is a call to humiliation. For what weighty matter of grief and shame it is that we should be unfit for the work of God! *We*, who ought to know how to convince a sinner of sin, since we have been convinced of it; who ought to be skilled in pointing him to the Saviour, since we have found our way to his footstool; who ought to have a solemn sense of eternal things, since our eyes have beheld their glory; who ought to labour in a spirit of unfeigned devotedness to God, since we have felt the influence of his love; what an affliction it should be to us that *we* yet proceed to our work in so defective a spirit, and pursue it in so unskilful a manner, that it shall have little or no adaptation to success! Is it not a shame to us? Does it not call upon us to humble ourselves before God, and to bewail the evils which so fatally impede our usefulness in his work? It would be painful if our success were obstructed by *others*; but how much more painful to find it obstructed by *ourselves*! In a work which it belongs to us to do, and which we ought to be prepared to do, to be so unskilful as to do harm rather than good! To see the very persons among whom we have been labouring still ignorant, stupid, and undone, because we have been trifling or feeble, self-seeking or self-sufficient! And thus to become ourselves the murderers of the souls of men, and of the very souls we would save! "Deliver us from blood-guiltiness, O God!"

But our feelings should not evaporate in sorrow. There is a call to diligence, as well as to grief. It is not as though the evils which we bewail could not be removed. They may be removed; and, if we apply ourselves to the task, they speedily will be so. If we study it diligently and prayerfully, the Word of God will dwell in us richly in all wisdom, and we shall become competent to wield the sword of the Spirit with much greater precision and effect; if we live nearer to eternity, we shall carry a more solemn and tender sense of it into our converse with the guilty and the lost; if we enter more deeply into the spirit of piety, we shall enter

more thoroughly into the spirit of our work. In a word, there is nothing pertaining to our fitness for this work of saving souls which we may not successfully cultivate. Are we not called upon to do this? How long do we mean that sinners should perish through our deficiencies? In what other case should we be content with evils which produced equal injury to others, and disappointment to ourselves? In this case above all others we ought not to be so; but we are called upon by the strongest motives to give all diligence in becoming better fitted for a work which we may not resign, and of which the issues are so unspeakably solemn.

5. I remark, in conclusion, that want of success in our labour ought not to induce either abandonment or despondency. Never suffer yourselves to say, "It is of no use to try any longer." As I have said already, you have an important object to effect even if a single sinner be not converted, and under no circumstances ought you to desist from taking a part with God in his righteous controversy with mankind. But, in addition to this, the object of saving men from everlasting destruction is clearly too important to be relinquished while any possibility of accomplishing it remains; and, if you are not competent to say what has been the effect of the past, how much less can you tell what may be the result of the future? As for despondency, it is one of the most injurious of all possible things. It does endless mischief, and is utterly destitute of reason. Though no sinner may have been converted under our instrumentality yet, the Lord's hand is not shortened that he cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear. If he should be pleased to exert his power, he can open the blindest eyes and subdue the stoutest heart; and when he may do so you know not. It may be speedily; the day of his power may be even now arrived. It may be that, while you are fainting, he is girding himself for the battle. It may be that he only looks for another resolved effort on your part, and for a little more exercise of faith and patience, before he pours you out an abundant blessing. It is characteristic of his ways to try faith before he rewards it; he has often reduced men to straits before he has granted them a supply, and many have found the borders of despair to be the verge of triumph. If you seem reduced to the necessity of despondency, that is just a reason why you should imbibe fresh hope. All your

self-sufficiency having perished, now make another effort, one more eminently in the name and strength of the Lord, and peradventure the Lord will be with you. At all events banish despondency. This can do no good, but is inevitably mischievous. It enfeebles all the impulses of action, as well as action itself. Under its influence you will either set about nothing at all, or nothing heartily. Making attempts without vigour, they will be equally without success; and, already depressed by disappointment, you will yield yourself a prey to its severer influences. Nothing is to be wrought by a despairing hand. Rather "be steadfast, and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as *ye know* that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. Neither be weary in well doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not." At all events, this promise must remain uncontradicted till the day of God; and, if then you find it broken, chide him for the forfeiture of his word.

LECTURE XII.

SUCCESS GRANTED.

"Now thanks be to God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place."—*2 Cor. ii. 14.*

IF it is not *always*, dear brethren, that you can associate such language as this with your efforts of usefulness, I trust it is so *sometimes*. If, indeed, you are of that inconsistent, but I fear at present large number of professors, who never try to turn a sinner to God, then, of course, you have never succeeded. Such a result is scarcely to be fallen upon by accident. Of many of you, however, I hope better things. Indeed, I know that you have been labouring for God, and for the souls of men; nor am I willing to believe that you have made prayerful, earnest, and persevering efforts, without being able to trace, in a greater or less degree, and however short of what you may have expected or desired, the beneficial influence of them. Having entered into contact with

the ignorance, prejudices, and passions of ungodly men, if often defeated, God has caused you on *some* occasions to triumph by Christ, whose truth and love have been your weapons in the war; and, if not in every place, yet in some of the places where you have been endeavouring to make it felt that, as the salt of the earth, you have not lost your saltiness, you have had the pleasure of seeing the savour of his knowledge more or less extensively diffused. Now it is our present business to consider what exercises of mind become us when success has been attained. In order that this subject may be more effectively pursued, let it be your concern to fix your eye distinctly and steadily on the portion of success which God has granted you, whatever it may be. Glance over the whole field and course of your labours, not to dwell on their general results, or to bewail their comparative fruitlessness, but for the purpose of selecting the instances—or the solitary instance if there be but one—of successful effort, that you may the more vividly realize them as facts, and the more readily awaken your hearts to just and corresponding emotions.

It is not for a moment to be supposed that you can look upon even a single instance of success in the conversion of sinners without emotion; and quite as little is it to be supposed that your emotions will be all that they ought to be. In the most devout mind holy exercises never spontaneously rise to a due height, or escape the perverting influence of inward corruption. In this point, as in all others, though our involuntary emotions may be far from feeble, we shall find that our hearts cannot safely be abandoned to themselves; on the contrary, they will need a close watchfulness and vigorous discipline, if we wish either to avoid what is wrong, or to fulfil what is right. We should beware of suffering ourselves to suppose that, because when a case of success arises we feel a thrill of gladness, or shed a few tears of ecstasy, or are led to bow in thankfulness to the Giver of all good, we have felt all which it is proper or important to feel; we may yet detect many an evil sentiment mingling itself with the good, or find that the good should be carried to a much greater extent.

What, then, are the emotions which a review of successful labour for the souls of men should awaken?

I. The first of them undoubtedly is *joy*. Upon this

obvious topic it would be easy to indulge in general representations of the delight with which we all know the conversion of a sinner is regarded in heaven, and should be regarded on earth; but I propose rather to exhibit in detail some of the grounds on which gladness may be strongly cherished.

1. You may rejoice, then, when you see that your endeavours have been blessed to the conversion of a sinner, *on account of the nature of the change* which is thus produced. There is an excellency in the change itself, and a blessedness in its consequences, altogether striking and incalculable.

Trace what has occurred *in the mind* of a converted sinner. His understanding was once darkness, the seat of deep ignorance, of rooted prejudices, of long-established errors; but you have seen the light of truth penetrate it, and the beam from heaven disperse the shadows of every form, until you can say, "Ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." His conscience, though not altogether incapable of feeling, was almost utterly torpid and insensible, having been stupefied and rendered callous by the long-cherished love and practice of sin; but you have seen it awake from its slumbers, throw off its torpidity, and assume a tenderness of sensibility, and a vigour of action, adapted to its supremacy in the moral constitution of man. You have seen the convictions of an enlightened understanding reach it with the speed and force of the lightning, and the internal monarch utter his mandates as in a voice of thunder. You have seen the passions, which were once as imperious and tyrannical as they were wedded to iniquity, and unchecked in their career by the slumbering conscience, quail before its awakened power, and submit themselves, at first perhaps unwillingly, to a sense of obligation, which ultimately they have learned to love. And thus the whole character has been changed; old things are passed away, and all things, inward and outward, are become new. There is something in such a change unspeakably interesting and delightful. It is a change from sin to righteousness; from pollution to purity; from what is base and abominable to what is excellent and holy: it is the extermination of principles of iniquity, and the generation in their stead of a character after the pattern of God's own heart. No words can do justice to the greatness or the value of such a transformation.

It is emphatically called "a new creation." You would doubtless feel much if you were allowed to be the spectator of a new world, as it should arise in beauty from its Maker's hand; but you may and should feel much more in contemplating the production of that which, in the case of every individual convert, may be justly called the new world "wherein dwelleth righteousness."

From the mind of a converted sinner, pass on to *his condition*. While in sin, he was at once tormented by his own passions, abhorred by his Maker, and condemned by his Judge. Wretched from the state of his own heart, though surrounded by sources of happiness, he was at the same time under a curse awful enough to make the ears of every one that heareth it to tingle. There lay on him the just wrath of an offended God; he stood instantly exposed to the stroke of that indignant arm which drove rebellious angels to the horrors of the deep, and could not be secure one moment that he should not be the next in the regions of perdition, and the anguish of despair. But what a change have you witnessed! By faith in Christ Jesus, this wretched victim of his iniquities has been rescued at once from the yoke of his bondage, and the curse of the law. Cancelled for ever is the condemnation that was written against him, and he is passed from death unto life; while the chains are likewise burst asunder from his soul, and he springs into liberty as the Lord's freeman. You have thus beheld a rebel whom vengeance was pursuing escape from the wrath to come; you have seen him welcomed to the footstool of mercy, and to the family of God; you have beheld him enter into the privileges of the saints on earth, and acquire a hope of their inheritance in heaven. Can you estimate the importance, or measure the immensity, of this change? Look down to the deeps of hell, and let your thoughts penetrate, as far as mortals may, the fathomless abyss—'tis thence that this immortal has been redeemed. Look upwards to the realms of "light which no man can approach unto," and gaze as intently as you can on those distant yet dazzling glories—'tis thither that this rescued one is destined. Can you view such a change without joy? Forbid it all the powers of sympathy in the heart of man! Compare it with any of the touching occurrences which may be witnessed in ordinary life. You would rejoice if, beholding a shipwrecked mariner

buffeting with the waves which, tempest-tossed, threatened every moment to devour him, and exerting every sinew of his fast-waning strength to reach the shore, where all dear and tender ties held and racked the wife and the children who looked upon his fate as their own, you should see him at length safely clasped in their embrace. You would rejoice if, while you were looking on a criminal appointed to die with the morrow's dawn, and gazing on the pallid countenance and the quivering frame too feebly indicating the unutterable agony of the inward strife, you were to witness the annunciation of his pardon, and the convulsed ecstasies through which he would return to the hopes and joys of the living, as from the very jaws of the grave. But how much more should you rejoice (for these occurrences, however interesting, are as nothing in the comparison) to see a perishing immortal escape from the brink of eternal woes, and reach, at one step, the gates of celestial glory!

Observe, further, the change in a converted sinner's condition *as it relates to God*. In his impenitence he was doing perpetual dishonour to his Maker, setting himself in an attitude of defiance to most just authority, trampling on righteous commands, and despising condescending mercy. Perhaps he was a blasphemer of the Most High, and his mouth full of imprecations. As a friend of God you beheld these things with no inconsiderable grief; your heart bled for your Father's honour, and the injuries aimed at him fell heavily on you. But, in this respect also, your wounds are now healed, and your tears are dried up. The once obdurate rebel is now submissive at his Maker's feet. No longer an enemy, he has laid down the weapons of the unhallowed war; he acknowledges the righteousness of the law he resisted, and loves the obedience he abhorred. Confession of his iniquity takes the place of excuses; and, while he comes with shame and confusion of face, he renders a willing honour to the Lord. In this, also, you may well rejoice. If you are on the Lord's side, *his* victories are *yours*.

2. If the conversion of a sinner by your instrumentality is thus in itself adapted to awaken your joy, it is yet more so *on account of your immediate connexion with it*. It must have engaged your attention with great intensity. Now the sympathy we feel in every case is proportioned to the force with which our attention has been drawn to it. It is, indeed,

an obdurate heart which does not sympathize with the entire mass of sorrow which we know exists in the world; but it is not such a general reflection which most powerfully awakens our feelings. It is when we enter some single habitation of woe, and behold affliction in its individual forms, the hunger, nakedness, and destitution of the houseless wanderer, the ghastly paleness of the wretched dying, or the sobs and tears of the new-made widow and fatherless, it is then that the heart is most deeply touched. On the same ground, while you rejoice at the conversion of sinners in a general view, your joy should be more especially awakened when such a result takes place by your own instrumentality. In this case you have been devoting a closer attention to the object. You have looked more nearly at the previous ignorance, depravity, and ruin; you have had continually before you the awful peril from which an escape has been effected; you have narrowly watched the progress of the inward strife: and now that its result appears, *your* heart should be prepared for the most vehement emotions of joy, emotions of a force which would leave the feelings of a stranger, though a pious one, far behind.

Your sympathy will naturally be still further heightened by the part you have taken in producing the effect. When we expend labour or resources of any kind upon an object, it tends to create an interest in it proportionately deep. We regard it then as an affair of our own, and identify ourselves much more closely than we otherwise should with the issue. Hence, therefore, your joy, when you see, not merely a sinner converted, but a sinner converted by your instrumentality. It is the success of *your own labour*, the happy issue of an endeavour which *you* have made. And this success may be the more interesting to you, because the labours from which it results have, perhaps, been far from inconsiderable. It is an object for which your efforts have been strenuous, your anxiety deep, your prayers importunate: you wanted it much, and you strove hard to attain it; and now it is attained, your delight is proportionate to the previous intensity of your concern.

There is something most delightful, also, though solemn and almost oppressive, in the thought of having achieved so vast an object. Our gratification in action always rises in proportion to the magnitude or value of the results we can

produce, and we feel this particularly when we have an opportunity of doing anything out of the ordinary course. We derive peculiar gratification, for example, when we can give effectual relief to a case of unusual distress, or to an unusual number of cases of distress; or, if circumstances occur which enable us to save life, as by rescuing a person from peril by water or by fire, or by procuring the pardon of a criminal condemned. This feeling is carried to an immeasurably greater height when we entertain the thought that we have saved a soul from death, and have thus hidden a multitude of sins, and prevented a multitude of sorrows. The words in which such a fact is expressed may be few and simple, and easily forgotten; but let the fact itself be weighed and realized, and it will be found to be vast and magnificent, even to oppression. If you have saved but one precious and immortal soul from eternal death, your existence has not been in vain. You have accomplished an object incalculably greater than the acquisition of wealth, or honour, or power, to whatever extent they might have been pursued; an object the value of which it will need the glories of eternity to demonstrate to you; an object for which an angel, and a host of angels, might be well contented to have lived.

It may be observed, further, that the conversion of a sinner most delightfully recompenses the labour by which it is effected. It gains love, the chief treasure of the human heart. How delightful the love is which is borne you by a person whom you have been the means of turning to the Lord! Dear and precious to him as his rescued soul and his inestimable privileges are, he links you with them all; he looks upon you as, under God, his deliverer, and pours upon you his warmest benedictions. Is it nothing that, when he sees you, his eye beams with a delight which the aspect of no other friend causes to glisten there? Is it nothing that you have gained in his heart the place of a benefactor second only to the Almighty himself? Amidst all the sounds expressive of affectionate regard—and all of them are sweet—is not the most delightful that which conveys to you “the blessing of him that was ready to perish”? Nor is this all; something still more delightful awaits you. Look forward to the eternal world. The day is coming when you will meet this redeemed sinner in the realms of glory, and, with new views of the change you have been the means of working in him,

will again clasp him to your heart; while, hand in hand presenting yourselves before your common Redeemer, you may say, with raptures yet unknown, "Behold me, and the recompense thou hast given me." For what is *your* hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even these, in the presence of the Lord Jesus at his coming?

If it should seem superfluous to show, with so much minuteness, the reasons why you should be joyful when sinners are converted by your instrumentality, I can only say that, natural as joy is in such a case, it never rises to a proper height, and that it needs the distinct and serious consideration of the topics I have now exhibited to awaken anything like an adequate emotion. We lose much by this defect, not only in pleasure, but in profit. Our joy is to be not only a gratification, but an impulse; and if on the one hand it is necessary, on the other it is highly important, that pains should be taken to raise it to a just elevation.

II. A second emotion to be cultivated in viewing the success of our labours is *gratitude*. That is to say, our joy should be blended with a reference to him who is the Giver of every good, and not be suffered to degenerate into self-gratulation and complacency. Perfectly obvious as it is that this ought to be the case, and natural as it will be to every devout or considerate mind, there is yet much danger, not merely of defect, but of transgression. Although not vain enough to say, with the open pride of an ancient king, "Is not this great Babylon which I have builded?" we are nevertheless sufficiently corrupt to rest with an unhallowed and self-elevating pleasure on the fact that we have been successful in turning a sinner to God, and secretly to take to ourselves a part of the honour which belongs to him alone. The prevention or correction of such feelings, and the cultivation of a just and proportionate gratitude, may be promoted by such methods as the following.

1. *We should impress ourselves with the fact that the conversion of a sinner by our instrumentality is owing, not to the means employed, but to the blessing of God upon them.* I say we should *impress* ourselves with this fact, because it is one of which there is not wanting any proof. We know, and fully admit, that every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights; and that, alike in the natural and in the spiritual world, while one planteth and

another watereth, it is God who giveth the increase. We know and admit that, without his almighty grace, the perverse heart of a sinner would refuse all instruction, would resist all importunity, would despise all warnings; and that, if left alone, we should be abandoned, even in our most strenuous exertions, to the derision of the foes with whom we have ventured to contend. If in any case it is otherwise, and if we have seen the dark mind enlightened and the stubborn heart subdued, it would be contradictory to all our knowledge, and a matter of manifest absurdity, to refer the efficacy of our endeavours in any measure to ourselves. Every right-minded and considerate husbandman, as he looks on the fields which are white unto the harvest, exclaims, Behold the goodness of God! And pre-eminently such should our language be, when, having gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed, we return again rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us. What is wanting in this case is not to establish the truth, but to impress it on our minds, that it may have its due effect; otherwise it will be in a great measure useless, and the evil feelings which it is adapted to correct will revel in defiance of it.

2. *Our gratitude should be further awakened by a recollection of the condescending kindness which God has herein shown us.* For it is an exercise of kindness that he should even permit us to labour, and much more that he should make us successful. He does, in fact, confer upon us in this method a most unspeakable pleasure, and it is for the purpose of conferring this pleasure that he employs our instrumentality. He has no need of us; nor will he permit us to regard his call to action, however authoritative, merely as labour imposed, but as a privilege allowed. The salvation of sinners is an object which he himself pursues with gladness, and from which he derives divine delight; and among his reasons for employing us this at least is one, that he wishes to impart to us a measure of his own joy. He has appointed that his word should reach the ear of sinners through our lips, and that his truth should be conveyed to their hearts through our hands, in order that the streams of that blessedness of which he is the fountain may flow into our breasts. How thankful we should be for such an arrangement! What a happiness, what an honour, it is, to be taken from that region of inferior pursuits in which we might have been left, and

associated with the Almighty in the accomplishment of his most glorious purposes; and to be made links in the chain of instrumental causes through which he impels his effectual agency! Why should he condescend to employ any such instrumentality for the accomplishment of his will? And if any, why mine?

3. *Our gratitude may be fed also by a distinct consideration of the unworthiness, or I may rather say the sinfulness, of the endeavours which have been so graciously blessed.* For what part of our activity for God can we look upon with entire satisfaction? Is there not everywhere, at the very best, a sad deficiency and mixture of motive, an afflictive want of solemnity and tenderness, together with a multitude of other evils adapted to frustrate the very endeavours we have made, and to provoke a holy God to withhold his blessing? Yet he has been so rich in mercy that he has forgiven all this iniquity, and granted a blessing notwithstanding all. In addition to this, we may be able to trace some of the success which has been afforded us to seasons of peculiar unworthiness, when we were more careless and prayerless than usual, when we were experiencing more especial barrenness, or when we felt more aggravated discouragement. If to such efforts the Lord has been graciously pleased to give a blessing, it must indeed be not for our sakes, but for his own name's sake, and to him should all the praise more carefully be given.

III. Finally, a view of our success should induce *enlargement* both of desire and exertion. Natural as this influence might seem to be, it is far from being uniformly or consistently felt. We are very prone to sit down contented with what we have effected, and to make it rather a plea for subsequent repose than an impulse to new exertion. Against this injurious perversion of a slothful heart we should be closely on our guard; and the more so because our desire is always apt to be too contracted, and success has a valuable tendency, when rightly considered, to expand it.

If a thing be really delightful to us, the possession of a little is clearly adapted to create a longing for more. It is so with any food which particularly pleases the palate; it is so with wealth, honour, friendship, and the other objects which engage the warm passions of men; and if the salvation of souls be really delightful to us, why should not its

effects be similar? Is this gratification so insipid to us that a little of it is sufficient? Having saved one or a few sinners from death, is the joy we derive from it so small that we covet no more?

And as our success is adapted to augment our desire, so it is equally adapted to encourage and quicken our exertions.

1. *It demonstrates the practicability of the object.* We were impeded in the outset of our labours, it may be, by a vague but oppressive feeling of the improbability of any good resulting from them. We had a sort of conviction that it would be vain for us to make any attempt; as though we could have said, "I am sure I can do nothing, and it is of no use to urge me to it." But in our success we have a practical proof of the erroneousness of such an idea. It is now manifest that even such endeavours as ours may be effectual to the saving of sinners, if God give them his blessing, since they have already been so, and what has been once may be again. When you look on the sinners who are still around you, therefore, it is no longer possible for you to say with any consistency or truth, "I cannot save them:" it is plain that, under God, you can, and that you have in your possession means truly and adequately adapted to the end. If henceforth you are slothful, it will evidently be, not because you cannot act, but because you will not. Do you mean that it should be so?

2. *It facilitates the attainment of the object.* It teaches us what the methods are in which success may be hoped for, and thus removes one of our early and most distressing embarrassments. In the commencement, perhaps, we felt as though the conversion of a sinner were a thing which we did not know how to set about; that we could not tell which way to begin, or what method to pursue. We did not know what appearances human guilt and perverseness would present, or by what methods we might rationally attempt to remove them. If we have been at all attentive to our work, this sense of ignorance can no longer exist. We have now come into close contact with the blinded understanding and the depraved heart of man; we have tried, however unskillfully, to meet their necessities; and, through God's mercy, we have not tried without success. Now, therefore, we know, in a measure, both what to expect and what to do. We have tried our weapons, we have found out something of

their adaptation and their power, and we are in some degree acquainted with the method of their use. And our knowledge is the more valuable because it is altogether practical. It is not the instruction of theory, but of experience, and it fits us decidedly for more easy and successful exertions in time to come. This surely is far from being a time to lay our labours aside. It would be a matter, not only of regret, but of shame, to suffer the knowledge we have thus acquired to be useless. On the contrary, our consciousness that the greatest difficulty is past, and that we have now a facility for the work which we have not had before, should clearly lead us to continued and extended activity.

3. *It realizes the anticipated pleasure of success*; and so tends to diminish the *vis inertiae*, the love of repose, which impedes every new exertion. The call of duty is, indeed, enforced in the first instance by the declaration that a reward *shall* be given; but the recompense is distant, if not uncertain, and is far from being vividly realized. Now, however, the sweets of successful labour have been actually tasted by you, and you can tell by experience whether the recompense is adequate to the toil. How do you now feel respecting the exertions you have already made? Are you at this moment sorry that the voice of duty effectually penetrated your ear, and reached your slumbering conscience; that the motives which summoned you to action, however unwelcome, were pressed home upon your heart till your long resisting indolence was overcome; that you contended with your fears, that you encountered the embarrassments of your early toil, and made whatever sacrifices it might involve of personal ease and gratification? Do you now wish that you had persevered in your resistance or evasion of every call, that you had still sheltered yourself under vain excuses, and maintained undisturbed your criminal repose? I am sure you do not. To say nothing of the immediate reward with which duty and rectitude are always connected, you have found the joy of saving one sinner outweigh all the conflict, and toil, and sacrifice, it has cost you. For such a result how gladly would you endure it all again! Endure it, then, again. That is the very thing I am urging upon you. Behold hundreds and thousands of other sinners perishing around you, and what you have done for those you have rescued do for those who are yet in peril. Their salvation

will be as precious a recompense to you as that of those on whom you now look with such ravishing joy. Will you not seize it? Or why should you, in this case, yield to slothful impediments which, in the former, you rejoice to have resisted and overcome?

4. *It supplies evidence of God's faithfulness to his promises.* These from the first have been the foundation of your hope, and yet often, perhaps, have been regarded with unbelief. You have feared that they would not be fulfilled, at least to *you*. Notwithstanding it was said to you, "Be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord," though you did not contradict, you doubted whether it would be so. Others, indeed, might be blessed, but you scarcely expected a blessing upon *your* labours. See now how you are confounded and put to shame! Though your unbelief has tended to preclude you from the benefit of the promise, yet in God's eternal faithfulness it has been fulfilled. *Your* labour has not been in vain in the Lord. The fidelity of the divine promise, therefore, is now not a matter of faith, but of experience. You can doubt it no more because it is a fact in your own history. Behold, then, the light which your own experience casts upon the future! You now *know* that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord; you will no longer hesitate, then, to act up to the full import of the exhortation founded upon this fact, "Therefore be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Or, should you not do so, we shall have occasion to suspect that even the recompense which the promises of God hold out to you is insufficient to awaken your desire, and to overcome your sloth.

5. *It gives a present recompense to toil.* When our labour for the souls of men is compared to that of the husbandman, and our instructions and diversified endeavours to the sowing of the seed, we should recollect that the only period which can properly be called the *harvest* is "the end of the world." We must wait till that day for the whole result of our exertions, and we might not unnaturally have been required to wait as long for every portion of it. To witness the fruitfulness of our scattered seed, and to bring the sheaves home with joy, is the work of the harvest rather than of the seed-time. Yet a measure of this is graciously granted us now. In the

present life we not only sow, but reap ; and, if at one period we are going forth weeping, bearing precious seed, at another we are returning with joy, bringing our sheaves with us. Is this condescending kindness to be lost upon us ? If we dislike toil so much that we will not *sow*, are we likewise so idle that we will not *reap* ? He that reapeth receiveth wages which may well recompense him for his toil, when he gathereth in fruit unto life eternal. And, if this partial reaping on earth is blessed, how much more blessed to the faithful and persevering labourer shall be his reward, when the harvest of the whole earth shall be ripe, and he shall reap with unutterable gladness the crop which grace has promised, and eternal love secures !

Such are the influences, dear brethren, which you should derive from success. Be joyful, be grateful, be enlarged. And the Lord make both your labours and your success a thousand times more than they are, until you shall be able to say with the apostle, "Now thanks be to God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place !" Amen.

ON THE FORMATION OF INDUSTRIAL CHARACTER.

I. THE PRIMARY LAW OF LABOUR.

In the second chapter of the book of Genesis, and at the eighth verse, it is thus written: "The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed." This was evidently not a part of the common earth, but a selected and peculiar locality, in which preparation had been made, by divine skill and with divine benignity, at once for the sustenance and gratification of man. "Out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food." Yet was our first parent placed in so beautiful and commodious a home, not for luxury (unless, indeed, industry may be regarded as an element of luxury), since we are expressly informed that the Lord God "put him into the garden to dress it and to keep it." This statement, however brief, is highly significant and important. It contains what we have called above the primary law of labour for mankind, and we shall be well repaid if we give it our serious consideration.

That which first strikes us is, that Adam was now fresh from the hands of his Maker, and as yet in unsullied innocence. We are thus standing at the fountain-head of our race. None of the sources of evil which have since polluted and poisoned the stream of human existence had then been opened. Man was in all his primal purity and loveliness before his Creator; and yet the Lord God, all benign and bountiful as he was, "put him into the garden to dress it and to keep it."

1. What was the character of this arrangement? Was it incidental or designed? Did it contemplate merely the ornamental condition of the garden, or had it an ulterior object in relation to man?

We know that a garden now requires to be dressed and kept with constant assiduity, in order to preserve its elegance, or even its neatness: but the want of so much care and toil is not necessarily associated with the idea of a garden in the paradisaic condition of the world; or, if to any extent it be so, the same benignity which "planted

the garden, and made it beautiful for Adam's accommodation, might easily have provided for the dressing and the keeping of it, had it been thought good to free him from the obligation to labour. Since no arrangement of this kind was made, it is fair to conclude that the tending of the garden was thrown upon our first parent in order to supply to him an occasion for laborious action, in circumstances in which no other occasion for it would naturally arise. We think, consequently, that the divine mode of proceeding had respect, not so much to the garden as to its favoured occupant, and that it had, with respect to him, the force, not of a permission merely, but of a precept. In placing Adam in a garden "to dress it and to keep it," the Lord God prescribed labour to him; he not only placed him where there would be something to do, but he enjoined the doing of it.

In speaking of the preceptive force of this arrangement, however, we have no intention of representing it as forming part of the moral law, with which, in its substance, it is necessary to suppose that man was made acquainted from the earliest period of his being. Industry was to our first parent rather a positive institution than a moral duty; or, to express the same idea in other words, a duty arising, not out of the relations he sustained, but out of specific prescription by an authority he was bound to obey.

2. Such being the character of the arrangement before us, let us now inquire what were its grounds.

It is evident that the law of labour was not founded in its necessity. At a subsequent period, indeed, man was doomed to eat bread in the sweat of his face, but it was not so now; the garden itself contained "every tree that was good for food," so that there could be no occasion for toil in order to procure him an abundant and luxurious supply for his physical wants. Indeed, the kind of labour required has no relation to the production of food. Man was put into the garden, not to cultivate it, but "to dress it and to keep it."

If not in necessity, we are left to conclude that the law of labour was founded in expediency, or, to use a better term, in wisdom. It had a wise and benign relation to the nature of man; and this in two aspects.

1. It had relation to man's natural aptitude and demand for action. In this respect man's nature is peculiar, as compared with that of the entire brute creation. We have no reason to conceive of them as impelled to any kind of activity, beyond that which is necessary to the sustentation of the individual on the one hand, and the continuance of the species on the other. They seem to be universally strangers both to speculation and to labour, beyond the range of their immediate wants. With man it is far otherwise. He is capable of much more than the toil which may be requisite for the supply of his physical necessities. This, indeed, may be said to be the least of the objects for which he lives—essential, certainly, but altogether subordinate to the great activities for which he was created. His powers of thought, imagination, and passion, qualify him for intellectual efforts; while his capacity of invention, construction, and intercourse, fits him for external operations. Thus marvellously endowed, he not only *can* act, but he *must* be active in order to be happy. His powers require a corresponding development. Without something to do he

would be miserable. The body and the mind alike demand a constant and vigorous exertion.

To this natural aptitude and demand for action there can be no doubt that the entire arrangements of the garden of Eden had a wise respect. For the occupation of the mind, indeed, the materials immediately at hand were abundant. The beauty of the young world on which his eyes were so newly opened, and the magnificence of the ærulean arch, with its ancient fires, which nightly drew them from earth to heaven, combined with the knowledge and love of him that made them all, and himself to gaze on them, must have afforded to the first man ample scope for contemplation. But he was not to be a speculative being exclusively. His body must be exercised, as well as his mind; and therefore was he "put into the garden," to meditate, indeed, but also to labour; and, since there was no other immediate call for labour, "to dress the garden and to keep it."

2. If, however, the law of labour was adapted, on the one hand, to man's capacity for action, it seems to have had relation, on the other, to his implied liability to sloth. For intellectual activity our first parent was left to the stimulus which his situation presented to him; bodily labour was enjoined on him. Was it, then, likely that he would be indolent? It was, at all events, possible that, amidst the stimulating appeals to his intellect and his imagination, the less gratifying efforts of physical toil might have been forgotten. The injunction "to dress the garden and to keep it," was, perhaps, necessary, to remind him that he was to be, not merely a philosopher, nor even merely a worshipper.

It may be deemed probable, however, that in the prescription of labour the Lord God had respect, not wholly to the first man, but also to the race of which he was to be the progenitor. He foresaw that with them the temptation to sloth would be strong, while the importance of labour would be great; and he would place upon record the adaptation of labour to man as holy, before he should have to denounce the doom so soon to follow on man as fallen. On this ground, perhaps, the law of labour stands conspicuous as a leading aspect of man's estate in innocence, that there should be no pretext for saying that it belongs to a condition of wrath, and is of the nature of a curse.

3. The character and the grounds of this arrangement being thus understood, we may take a passing glance at its adaptation.

It was, of course, not intended in paradise that the law of labour should be burdensome. As the dressing and keeping of the garden was not designed to be the whole of man's employment, so neither can it be supposed to have consumed so much time, or to have required so much toil, as to create either weariness or disgust. Its object must have been to open a source of combined benefit and pleasure, to contribute at once to health and gratification. Not interfering with his intellectual occupations, the labour assigned to the first man was at once in the highest degree salutary, and eminently adapted to his constitutional sentiments. We have an instinctive love for the useful and the ornamental. In dressing and keeping the garden, which was his residence, Adam must have found the gratification of both these sentiments. Dressed and kept with assiduity,

the garden would be both more commodious and more beautiful, and in its progressive changes it would afford scope at once for the exercise of his taste, and the augmentation of his domestic pleasures.

Adapted to man as the law of labour was in its operation, it was not less so in an exception with which, from the first, it was accompanied. It did not affect every day alike; for "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his work which he had created and made." "The seventh day"—that is, every seventh day—was thus "sanctified," or set apart from all other days, in respect of the precept of labour; and the same authority which required industry on other days sanctioned repose on this. How profoundly benign this release was in its conception, and how unspeakably beneficent it has been to the human race in its operation, words are wanting to declare.

4. Thus far we have seen man in paradise, and have spoken of the law of labour as prescribed to him in his state of innocence. We must now look at him as he was after the first transgression, and as his condition was modified by that far-reaching iniquity. We behold him, then, no longer in the garden which his Maker's hand had enriched and adorned for his reception; but expelled in anger from it to the common earth, where he and his race have to realize, by sad experience, the import and certainty of a doom which was thus expressed: "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground."

It would not be suitable either to the purpose or the limits of this paper, to attempt a full exposition of this important and instructive portion of Holy Writ; we shall, consequently, content ourselves with drawing from it one or two remarks, illustrative of the modification which the primary law of labour underwent in consequence of the fall.

In the first place, there was henceforth a necessity for labour in order to a supply of food. In Eden the Lord God had planted "every tree that was good for food," and in this spontaneous supply of divine bounty our first parents found their daily bread; but the earth no longer yielded them such sources of nutriment. They were now to "eat the herb of the field"—a phrase by which the various esculent and frumentiferous plants may have been denoted; and, for the purpose of procuring it in sufficient quantity, they were "to till the ground."

In the second place, there was henceforth, not only a necessity for labour, but a necessity for much severer labour than had been required in paradise. *There* was "a garden" in luxuriant fruitfulness and beauty, and Adam had only "to dress it and to keep it;" *here* was a blasted soil, which presented but "thorns and thistles" to him that was asking for bread, and which would yield no food but on the hard condition of being watered with "the sweat of his face."

There can be no doubt but that this change in man's condition was an expression of divine displeasure against his sin; yet in the midst of wrath did God remember mercy. In a marvellous manner is the law of labour, even in this aggravated form, adapted to the well-being of

mankind as a fallen and degenerate race. If innocent man would have employed life wisely and well, and required physical toil only as a relief to holy contemplation, depraved man could not be relied on for a similar course; the imaginations of his heart would be "only evil from his youth," and his energies would be thrown into a constant activity of wrong, with a vehemence which the earth would be ill able to bear. It was, consequently, a matter of the highest wisdom to drain off the superabundant vigour of the human race into some other channel, lest the tide of wickedness should rise too high, and its waves become too tumultuous. The necessity of constant and severe toil was precisely adapted to this end. It left man comparatively little time, and little strength, for anything but the supply of his most immediate wants; and, in providing for these, it bound him to an occupation at once innocent and salutary. It is true, indeed, that, notwithstanding this precaution, the earth has been filled to a lamentable extent with iniquity and violence; but that it would have been much more lamentably so without the operation of this check, cannot be questioned: nor can any words, we think, express the amount of human transgression which has been, and still is, prevented—suppressed in its origin—by the merciful decree, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread."

5. By the multiplication of the human race, and the development of its social aspects, the primary law of labour, while maintaining a constant operation, underwent considerable practical modifications. The first, and, at first, the only labour of man, was the culture of the ground. What he wanted was food, and this, at the moment, was all he wanted. But he soon wanted other things; and, means of accommodation being profusely spread around him, he found both opportunity and skill for the satisfaction of his new desires. Not all the time, nor all the strength, of a rapidly multiplying community were demanded by the labours of the field. If Cain devoted himself to husbandry, Abel was a keeper of sheep, and subsequently Jabal became "the father of such as dwell in tents, and have cattle." Nor was it very long before the capabilities of the more useful metals were discovered and brought into service, Tubal Cain becoming "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron." The musical ear likewise early developed itself, and both the science and the practice of harmony ministered to the gratification of antediluvial taste; for "Jubal was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ." Mankind being thus stimulated both from within and from without, quickened by the many impulses and urged by the many wants of their mysterious nature, the original simplicity of labour was after a while lost; and the race which had, in words, been doomed to do one thing, was found to work out its doom by doing many things. Thus grew up the arts and the sciences, now multiplied to a glorious, and all but a miraculous, host. Thus appeared the two great classes into which the world, with all its varieties, has ever since been divisible—producers and consumers—and trade, the process by which one class of producers exchanges commodities with another.

6. In human life, as it has thus ultimately developed itself, it is manifest that the *necessity* of labour, as an aspect of man's condition, has become materially modified. It is no longer universal. There

are some—in fact, there are many—who can supply their own wants without toil, by means of the wealth which is in their hands. What now is their position in relation to the law of labour? They *can* live without work; are they obliged to work?

In reply to this question it may be observed that, if there really were, as we have endeavoured to show, a *law* of labour given to Adam in innocence, and to the race in him, it must be of universal obligation. Its bearing cannot be removed from any individuals by the mere accident of their wealth. If exemption were allowed on this ground, the character of a law would entirely disappear, and the state of things would be better expressed by the formula—Those are to work who must, and those who can do without it may be idle. We could not readily accept such a representation.

It is obvious, however, on the other side, that persons of property cannot be held to be under obligation to work *for their bread*. The primary law of labour relates rather to industry in a general view, than to any particular form of it. It is only a barrier against sloth; and it leaves open to every man the selection of that kind of activity to which he may be most urged by his wants, or drawn by his inclinations. But every man should labour. To avail ourselves of the abundance with which divine providence may have favoured us in order to slip our necks out of the yoke, and to spend our days in mere luxury and inaction, is culpably and ungratefully to evade an obligation which clearly rests upon all. And this violation of law is assuredly not without its punishment. The mischiefs of indolence, both to the mind and the body, are serious and multiform, and they cannot be escaped. There is no man who can yield himself to a slothful habit, without finding it productive of debility, approaching to paralysis, of his powers on the one hand, and a brood of active and rampant vices on the other. Not the officers of justice so quickly follow, and so certainly track, the violator of his country's laws, as the messengers of the divine government the transgressor of God's great law of industry.

Nor need there be associated with such a position a sentiment of degradation, or of hardship. Among the toils of human life are the very noblest, most elevating, most beneficent, of its occupations. Why should he repine to be active, who has before him such interesting and glorious avenues for exertion as are presented by the arts and the sciences, by speculative philosophy, by the great problems of human society, or the wide aspects of human misery? To have “bread enough and to spare,” instead of being an hindrance to such pursuits, ought rather to be regarded as a felicitous accident, placing us unembarrassed at the outset of a course, than which none need be either more honourable or more delightful.

II. THE APPLICATION OF MORAL LAW TO THE LAW OF LABOUR.

WE have already said that the precept of labour was a positive prescription, and not a part of the moral law. Had there been but one man, the fulfilment of it would have no further touched on the moral law than as one expression of the supreme love to God which it enjoins. The growth of human society, however, gave origin to the relations of men one to another, and hence the moral law, which is in part directed to the regulation of these relations, becomes immediately complicated with the law of labour. Man no longer stands alone. His conduct affects all around him, and his pursuit of industry must be characterized by rectitude. In toiling for himself he must do no injury to his fellow.

In its view of the relations of men one to another, the sense of the moral law is expressed in one great principle: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" or, in words somewhat more diffuse, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." This general principle will be found applicable to the formation of industrial character in several ways.

1. First, it demands integrity. Its language is, "Thou shalt not steal."

The idea of property is undoubtedly secondary and artificial. Man, as he now comes into the world, possesses nothing. The first man had the whole world for himself. It was all his own, since there was no one to share it with him. But when men multiplied, then of necessity arose the notion of individual and exclusive rights. The notion of property is now complex, and it is not in all cases easy to define it; but here we have it in its simplest form. The materials being unappropriated, the produce of a man's labour is his own. It is the representative of his strength and skill, that is, of himself; it is but himself in another form. No one has more right to possess himself of that which another's labour has produced, than he has to possess himself of the free body and mind which produced it. Next after personal freedom, therefore, or the idea of a man's rightful property in himself, comes the conception of his rightful property in the produce of his toil.

The notion of property, which thus arises out of labour, now extends itself much farther, as to things valuable procured by purchase, received by gift, or possessed by prescription. But property of all kinds is taken under the protection, not only of human, but also of divine law. The precept, "Thou shalt not steal," is directed against one of the most palpable interferences with it, and would have great scope if it were applied only to offences which violate the letter of it. There is much more of real stealing than is perpetrated by the actual burglar, or the street thief. The traffic and intercourse of life create innumerable opportunities of larger or smaller thefts, or appropriations of what is not our own, whether in money or other articles; and it should be set down as a first principle in the formation of an industrial character, that all such acts are condemned by the law of God. Never think for a moment of taking what is not yours, even of the smallest value, or under the strongest temptation.

Sacredly regard the property of others, of whatever amount, in whatever circumstances; let it lie by you exposed, if so it be, in absolute security.

The spirit of the precept we are considering, however, extends much farther than the letter. There are many modes of robbery which are not literally stealing. There are frauds, as well as thefts; and the artificial modes in which business is now conducted afford innumerable opportunities for frauds, of larger or smaller amount. Some men pride themselves on their ingenuity in availing themselves of these opportunities, and seem to know no shame but in being detected. The injunction of the sacred Oracles, however, is, "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour." Carry a delicate and sensitive honesty into all your proceedings. Straightforward and transparent be all your transactions. Never take advantage of the ignorance or simplicity of those with whom you have to deal. Never be induced to a questionable proceeding by the disguise you may effectually throw over it. Never lend what you ought not to lend, nor borrow when you ought not to borrow. Never falsify accounts. Use no false weights or deceitful measures. Never deal in fictitious paper. Never become security beyond your real and available means. Use no freedoms, either with property in trust, or with another man's name.

There is, however, more than a negative idea in this precept. It is not merely a prohibition of thefts and frauds; it is an injunction of positive integrity. To do unto others as we would have them do unto us, is not merely to eschew practices which would injure, but to exercise a care over the property of others, so far as it may be intrusted to us, such as we should exercise if it were our own, and fully justifying the confidence reposed in us. A man may be able to say, "I have committed neither theft nor fraud," and yet he may have been a reckless debtor, an unfaithful servant, an inattentive agent, an extravagant partner, or a negligent consignee.

Such is the first point of contact between the moral law and the law of labour. It demands integrity.

2. And it demands, secondly, veracity.

In this, as in the preceding case, a precept is directed expressly against the extreme violation of the requirement, "Lie not one to another." The dealings of men one with another necessarily involve a large amount of assertion, more or less direct, and at once open a wide scope for departure from truth, and present many temptations to it. No moral obligation, however, can be more clear or unquestionable than that of speaking the truth; and the obligation acquires a double force when, as in matters of traffic, the interest of another is directly involved. If the general practice of lying is culpable, as undermining that confidence in testimony which lies at the basis of all social intercourse, it is far more heinous when it deals with the substantial interests and property of the community. To obtain a larger price for an article by falsely stating either its cost or its quality, is, indeed, but another mode of robbery—a robbery by cowardice and stratagem. All satisfactory dealing proceeds on the supposition that the truth is told; and, were this assumed veracity avowedly abandoned, and the whole world's traffic a known system of universal falsehood, the mart and the exchange might well be said

to be converted into "a den of thieves," from which every man in his turn would shrink with insuperable disgust. It is only by the supposed prevalence of truthfulness, indeed, that an advantageous lie becomes possible; and to take advantage of the unsuspecting confidence placed in your veracity in order to deceive and defraud, is as mean as it is dishonest. If a man intends to rob me of a shilling or a guinea, it is less base to do it openly by putting his hand into my pocket, than to do it covertly by false dealing.

There is no obligation of which persons engaged in traffic should be more scrupulously mindful than this of speaking the truth. There are in dealing so many words uttered, and with so much rapidity and thoughtlessness, there are so many difficulties met with in securing purchasers, and so many immediate advantages to be laid hold of by a present, and, for the moment, a safe falsehood, that the inducements and the perils are many; yet they should uniformly and invariably be resisted. A lie is always an immorality, and should on no consideration be uttered.

The obligation of veracity, however, is not restricted to the prohibition of direct falsehood. Deception may be practised without a lie being told. A partial statement may have the effect of a false one. Suppression of the truth is, indeed, but one form of falsehood. Suggestions and innuendos may do the work of assertions, especially when combined with the ignorance or simplicity of the party to whom they are addressed. There may even be *lying goods*, which upon the face of them shall seem to be much better than they are, silent perpetrators of a delusion to which the vendor culpably lends his sanction. Along with this class of deceptions may be ranked the multitude of artifices too commonly employed in trade, whether by the adulteration of articles sold, by a delusive exhibition of articles to the eye, or by pretended clearances or reductions in price. The whole of this system is of the essential nature of a lie, and is utterly inconsistent with the moral obligation of veracity.

Still more is required, however, than to avoid the practising of deceptions on our own part; it behoves us, when we may, to prevent others from deceiving themselves. It is possible, and doubtless of frequent occurrence, that persons, through ignorance, may effect purchases of bad quality or excessive price, while tradesmen may look complacently on, and be ready to excuse themselves in such terms as these: "I said nothing; it was not for me to prevent it." A faithful moralist must reply to such an excuse, "*It was* for you to prevent it, if you had been really an honest man; since the party was misled by an unsuspecting confidence in your integrity.

The moral law, we have thus seen, in its application to the law of labour, demands integrity and veracity.

3. It demands also, in the third place, equity.

The idea which we mean to suggest by this term is that of relative justice, or fair dealing; and it may be regarded as applicable, on the one hand, to persons employed by us, or, on the other, to persons with whom we come into competition.

With respect to persons employed by a principal in his service the scriptural precept comes directly into bearing: "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal."

Certainly, the labour we employ should be remunerated. It is a maxim of universal acception, "The labourer is worthy of his hire;" and to withhold it has been in all ages denounced as oppression and wrong. "Behold," says a sacred writer, addressing in indignant terms men of this description—"Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." It is, in truth, but another species of robbery, since a man's labour is emphatically his own, and ought no more to be taken by another than anything else he may possess. For the most part, also, it may be said of those who labour for others that their labour is *all* they possess, and that to rob them of this is to rob them of their all. No men are either more unjust or more infamous than those who withhold the hire of the labourer.

This is not all, however. Masters are not only to give something in the shape of wages to their servants, but "that which is just and equal."

We are aware that we are now to speak upon a subject which is at once of much importance and much difficulty, and we shall endeavour to speak of it with discretion as well as firmness.

We may begin by calling to the remembrance of our readers the admitted fact, not only that, in many cases, the wages of work-people are less than the comfortable supply of their wants requires, but that, in some extreme cases, they have been reduced below all limits of justice and reason. As in ancient, so in modern days, there too notoriously is such a thing as "grinding the faces of the poor," and taking advantage of their poverty and helplessness to exact toil as by the gripe of an oppressor. Whatever we may be obliged to admit concerning the laws by which the remuneration of labour must ultimately be regulated, nothing can extort from us a justification of such a course as this, or avail to screen it from the loathing and condemnation of mankind. It needs to be loudly rung into the ears of some men,—“Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal.”

But what things, then, are "just and equal"? And by what rules can the proper rate of wages be determined? The question is a fair, an important, and a necessary one; and we will express our mind upon it.

It is necessary to admit, at the outset of this inquiry, that neither the wishes of labourers for themselves, nor those of benevolent persons in their behalf, can constitute any guide in this matter. There are certain great principles at work in the body politic which issue necessarily in corresponding results, and are beyond human control. For example, the price of all commodities is regulated by the joint influence of the supply and the demand; and labour being, like corn, an article in the market, it will, like corn, have a higher or a lower price according to this rule. Again, with respect to articles taken to market, the labour employed upon them is a part of the cost of production; and the price at which the articles can be sold must affect the sum at which the vendor can afford to produce them, or, which is the same thing, the wages he can give to those who make them. Sometimes the operation of these causes leads to a condition of high

wages, as when the demand for labour is great and the supply is small, or when the profit on sales is large and the cost of production need not be stinted. At other times the operation of the same causes leads to the depression of wages; as when the market is glutted, either with labour or with goods, and the master says, "I cannot sell at a profit if I give you more than so much; and, if you will not work for me at that price, others will." These ruling principles in the social system produce their effects on a great scale, and with irresistible power. They operate like the laws of the natural world, silently, but beyond control, and to complain of them were vain. They are, doubtless, as benignant as they are irresistible.

Turning our eyes away, then, from these unchangeable elements, it must be our business to inquire whether there are not blended with them, in our commercial system, some elements which are *not* necessary and unchangeable, but rather voluntary, and liable to advantageous and even obligatory modification.

The two great energies of the commercial system are labour and capital; the work that is done, and the money that pays for it. Now, when we look at the actual results of these two to the parties respectively in possession of them, we cannot but be struck with an amazing inequality. In prosperous seasons—and, indeed, on the whole, taking prosperous and adverse seasons together—capital grows at an enormous rate, and multiplies itself rapidly a thousand-fold. By the employment of it some persons rise in a few years to vast wealth, and high social position. But what are the results of labour? The artisan just obtains his daily bread, and is enabled to support his family in decency—no more. Now, looking at this statement as representing a fact, and merely as representing a fact, without indulging in any speculation respecting it, and as representing a fact exhibited without any exaggeration—we might rather say, with exemplary moderation—we ask the plain and simple question, Is this right? Are these things "just and equal"? Is it right that of the large pecuniary results accruing from the joint operation of capital and labour, capital should absorb so large a proportion, and labour receive one so small?

Without laying it down as a principle that capital and labour should be regarded as equivalent elements in the commercial system, and entitled to share equally in its gains, and without, indeed, making any curious inquiry into the relative value of these two elements as compared one with another, we think little hesitation can be felt by considerate persons in coming to the conclusion that things are not right as they are. In some way or other, and to some extent or other, labour ought to be better rewarded than it is.

It is true, that the almost absolute monopoly of profits by the capitalist is not obstructed by the operation of any providential law, such as those which regulate the market price of labour and the cost of production. While honourably complying with these laws, it is yet *in his power* to appropriate everything beyond the reach of them to himself; but this is far from settling the question whether he *ought* to do so. It is here, in truth, that the moral question originates. In the respects just mentioned the capitalist acts under a necessity. He gives wages, whether lower or higher, generally speaking, as he must; it is only as to the disposal of the ultimate

clear profits that he has any option. At this point, consequently, the voice of moral law should be heard; since, if not heard here, it is allowed no bearing on this matter at all.

We take, then, for the sake of illustration, a supposititious case. A capitalist has employed a sum of ten thousand pounds and a body of twenty workmen, and, after paying all costs of production, together with contingent and domestic expenses, and interest on capital, whether fixed or floating, he has realized a clear profit of a thousand pounds. What ought he to do with this sum? We aid his decision of this question by presenting to him the great moral rule,—“Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you;” and we say to him, If you were one of the twenty men whose toil, conjointly with your capital, has gained this sum, what would you wish to be done to you? Or, rather, what do you think you might reasonably wish? Would you say, “I have had my wages—thirty shillings a week, perhaps—and that is enough”? Or might it not suggest itself to you, that *some* part of the net profits would be not unjustly returned to the working hands? Suppose, for example, one hundred pounds out of it, in gratuities of five pounds to each?

We wait for no answer to this question, but leave it to do its work, if it has any to do, upon the consciences of the thoughtful and the upright. Our case is sufficient to bring out our proposition, which is, that labour, over and above its immediate remuneration at the market price, is morally entitled to a portion of the profits, in conjunction with capital. Of course, we speak of this only as a moral right, and not as one to be in any way recognized or enforced by human law. If such a course were pursued at all, it should be adopted voluntarily, and the amount determined in a conscientious manner, by reference to particulars known only to the parties themselves.

We do not enunciate this general notion without hesitation, not only because the subject is one of acknowledged difficulty, but more especially because it has relation to a department of science with which we are not professionally conversant, and on which we cannot suppose we shall be allowed to speak with any authority. We speak with yet greater diffidence, because, while the subject is comparatively new to us, the conclusion at which we have arrived is wholly so, and, so far as we know, new to the world. It may, perhaps, be received with a smile by commercial men, or perhaps with a shout of derision. We have not spoken, however, without thought; and all we ask for our proposition is the candid consideration of that class of men at whose hands questions of morals are likely to meet with justice. No doubt the adoption of such a principle would be attended with many difficulties, but these might, with patient endeavour, be for the most part overcome; and, however reluctant men of low moral standing might be to act upon it, we are sure that, if it came to be laid down as an acknowledged principle of commercial ethics, it would not be long without an extensive influence on employers, and a most beneficial effect on the employed. How much might it not do to soothe the asperities, if it might not lead to the final termination, of the controversy which has so long, and often so angrily, been carried on as to the comparative rights of labour and capital, and to bring our commercial system into harmony with the acknowledged rules of moral obligation!

We have thus far been illustrating the obligation of equity towards persons who may be employed by us; we now advert to it as affecting our conduct towards those with whom we may come into competition.

Competition arises, by a natural and inevitable process, out of the extension of commercial transactions, and does not seem to be, in itself, contrary to moral law. The many evils, indeed, to which excessive and unfair competition has given birth, have led some persons to advocate the extinction of the competitive system altogether, in favour of the co-operative; a scheme of which it may justly be said that, if it do not involve an absolute impracticability, it could scarcely be put in practice without creating greater evils than those it may be intended to cure.

Our conduct in competition with others, however, is clearly subject to moral law, and it is by a due observance of its precepts and spirit that many, if not all, of the evils incident to competition may be remedied or mitigated.

Some of the evils which arise from competition are of a general kind. The eagerness and keenness which in these circumstances characterize trade, give an unwonted force to the temptations which always exist to the various modes of deception and fraud; but of the bearing of the moral law on these we have already spoken. Some of the evils which arise from competition, however, are of a special character, and upon the principal of these we will offer a few remarks.

One of these is an excessive reduction of profits on business done, so that a livelihood cannot be obtained by a reasonable amount of general trade. To such an extreme is this sometimes carried, that persons will do business at no profit, or at a loss, for a season, in order to establish themselves. Another evil of competition is to be found in the too sharp rivalry engendered by the contract system. With this system, as a whole, we are not finding fault; but with the tradesmen who will accept contracts at too low a figure, to the sure injury of fairer tradesmen, and to the too probable ruin of their own affairs. A third species of mischievous competition consists in the taking unfair advantage by tradesmen one of another; as, by means of information improperly acquired, or by injurious insinuations, or by the numerous varieties of what is currently termed "sharp practice." And, to enumerate but one more, to be added to this list is the excessive reduction of wages for work done; a reduction, in some cases, cruelly carried below what the simplest necessities of nature demand.

Can these things—we include them all—be less than immoral? Does not moral law forbid and condemn them? Can they, by any process, be brought into harmony with the precept, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also unto them"? We think not. There are no sacrifices which an upright man ought not rather to make than be guilty of them.

4. At this point we might conclude our references to the moral law as bearing on the law of labour, were it not that the progress of human industry has given rise to human legislation in relation to it. Upon this matter it is necessary to add a few words.

We scarcely need amplify our mention of the fact. It is too well known to require more than mention, that governments have enacted

many laws affecting trade and manufactures, among which are some intended to raise a revenue for the public service, and others designed to protect native industry from foreign competition. It is to the two classes of laws thus specified that we particularly refer, and we shall speak of them under the general appellation of the Revenue Laws.

We are aware that we are now treading on tender, and perhaps on difficult, ground; but, while cultivating prudence, we shall express our sentiments with freedom.

We said the ground was tender. It is so because the habit extensively prevails of evading the revenue laws wherever it is practicable; and the more so because this habit prevails, not merely among persons of general dishonesty, but also among persons of high reputation, and in other respects of undoubted integrity. It must of necessity be assumed that these persons think they are doing right, and that they do not regard the revenue laws as morally binding.

It is in this form, consequently, that the question comes up—Are the revenue laws of moral obligation? If they are not, but are of no further force than the machinery of government, by its watchful functionaries, puts into them, then it may be that there is a just plea for rendering no more obedience to them than prudence suggests or fear constrains, and a fair opening for putting the cunning of the tradesman into play against the acuteness of the supervisor. If, however, the revenue laws are of moral obligation, all this is at an end. Obedience is then a duty to God, and to be rendered at once cheerfully and universally.

The question, however, whether the revenue laws are of moral obligation, resolves itself into one still more general—namely, into this, Are human laws at large of moral obligation? For there is nothing in the revenue laws so peculiar as to separate them from the general mass. They originate from the same power, and are enforced by the same authority, as all other laws; and, if human laws in general are of moral obligation, it seems impossible to assign a reason why the revenue laws in particular should not be so.

Let us take up, then, this larger question, the decision of which will carry with it that of the smaller. Are human laws of moral obligation? Or, is it a moral duty to obey the government under which we live?

It is not necessary, in order to answer this question, to go into any inquiries as to either the actual origin of human governments, or the proper fountain of political power. If human governments are to be dealt with by the moralist at all, they must obviously be taken as they are; to exempt from rules of duty all governments but righteous ones, would be to abandon nearly—perhaps entirely—the whole world to anarchy and wretchedness. And in this manner, in fact, the supreme authority in morals has treated the subject before us. Thus it is written:—

“Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves punishment.* . . .

* In the authorized version, “damnation,”

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake."

Here is clearly enunciated a principle, not only of wide, but of universal, application. "There is no power," that is, no government, "but of God." It is certainly not necessary to understand this apostolic declaration as asserting "the divine right of kings," or as meaning that every actual form of government is accordant with the mind of God—a conclusion to which the wide diversity among them, to say nothing of the oppressive character of too many of them, would be an insuperable bar. But every government is "of God," in the sense of being permitted by his providence, and being also, while so permitted, the instrument of his will. As human society in large masses cannot subsist without government of some kind, so government in the abstract must be regarded as of divine sanction and institution; and, as all government implies obedience as well as rule, the duty of obedience to government generally must be deemed to be of moral obligation. The duty of obedience to government, however, comes upon no man in the abstract; it comes to all in the shape of some particular form of government, to which each may, in divine providence, be subject. Hence, the only way of fulfilling the general obligation is by obeying the particular form of it, and by considering the moral right which enforces obedience to government as such, as enforcing also obedience to each several government apart. Thus "the powers that be are ordained of God; and he that resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God."

Obedience to human law being thus of moral obligation, the case of the revenue laws is easily decided. The apostle, indeed, distinctly makes the application of his general principle to this matter. "For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers attending continually upon this very thing. Render, therefore, to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

Theoretically, this conclusion is clear and unembarrassed. Practically, however, a difficulty may be raised by asking us whether we are prepared to urge the consistent carrying out of the principle laid down, or to condemn the deviations from it in which honourable men so constantly indulge themselves? The Stamp Acts, for example, attach a penalty alike to the giving and taking of a receipt above five pounds without a stamp; and yet multitudes of such receipts are both given and taken without stamps. Do we mean to say that this is morally wrong, and that every person is bound in conscience to obey this law?

In reply to this question we beg to inquire on what principle non-obedience to the law in this case is to be justified? We have heard pleaded in defence of it general custom, sometimes dignified with the appellation of the law of custom; general confidence, by virtue of which stamps are not necessary; and the risk attaching to unstamped receipts, which is alleged to constitute a sufficient penalty. With justificatory arguments more forcible than these we are not acquainted, and we must confess that, in the face of a *conscientious* element in the obligation of human law at large, and of the revenue laws in particular, the force of these appears to us very small. The

meaning of them is, that moral duty may be set aside, perhaps for personal convenience, but certainly by general consent. And if one portion may, why not another? And, indeed, why not the whole?

We cannot hesitate, therefore, in our decision upon this matter. We think it one on which the general morality is too lax, and on which many good men are inconsiderate.

And this example determines the whole class of cases of which it is a specimen. We cannot do less than lay down the precept in its most general terms—Attempt no frauds upon the revenue. Fully obey the law, and without being looked after. Renounce smuggling under every modification. Eschew adulteration of excisable articles. Use, in every case, the requisite stamps. “Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute, and custom to whom custom.”

With these remarks we conclude our notice of the application of moral law to the law of labour.

III. THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE LAW OF LABOUR.

The Christian era was undoubtedly of great importance to the world. It had been long looked forward to with eager hope, and much was the world in need of those renovating influences to which it was to give birth. Of its more general results it is not for us here to take notice, but we shall have something to say of it in relation to the topic immediately before us.

From a very early age there have been some—perhaps we might say many—who seem to have thought that by Christianity the law of labour was repealed. Many, at least, have acted as though they thought so, since they have seen it right, and perhaps have felt it obligatory, to withdraw themselves from all the ordinary occupations of life, and to shroud themselves in seclusion and sloth, in the name, and under the professed influence, of Christianity. According to their ideas, it was but a small measure of this vital power that was compatible with the pursuit of worldly callings; its more abundant and characteristic energy led to the renunciation of an earthly life, alike in its pleasures and its toils, and to the cultivation of a heavenly one in absorbing meditation, and consequently in indolence. Such was the radical element of the monastic system, and under the operation of it, more or less modified or corrupted, a vast multitude of persons, in successive ages, have thrown off habits of industry, and devoted themselves to a professedly religious seclusion.

It would be a very serious imputation upon Christianity to hold it responsible for the production of such a state of things. That it is in extreme contrariety to the active nature of man is obvious at a glance, and it is too plain to be denied that, if it were to become universal, it would be totally destructive, not of human welfare only, but of the human race. Yet, if it be right, or, which is the same thing, if it be Christian, it ought to be capable of being universal.

It is not in Christianity, however, but in a misunderstanding and perversion of Christianity, that the monastic institute has arisen. The “glorious Gospel of the blessed God,” indeed, now fully revealed

to us, makes an appeal to faith such as was never made in the preceding ages of the world, and the things which are not seen present themselves to the mind in an attitude of unwonted and commanding beauty. Piety is necessarily contemplative, and a Christian must be so too; but piety is not exclusively contemplative, nor must a Christian be so. Everything that the Gospel reveals constitutes a motive to action, and justly to realize the things that are revealed is to act under their influence. The evangelical precept is—"Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God,"—a precept which implies the continuance of our ordinary engagements with the inspiration of a new motive, and which is very far from being fulfilled by the occupation of a cell in a monastery, or of a hermitage in the desert.

It may be said, indeed, that Christianity makes larger demands on the activity of men than have ever before been addressed to them, since, by the efforts it requires for its own diffusion in the world, it creates an entirely new, and a very extensive, department of labour. Its glad tidings are to be proclaimed "to every creature," and its agents are to go "into all the world." The Redeemer of mankind thus engages his followers in a scheme far too vast for indolence; and, if there be those whose immediate duties hold them with so lax a grasp that it is possible for them to retire into a fruitless solitude, the claims of a sovereign Lord, and the necessities of a perishing world, are well fitted to call them thence. All, in fact, are summoned to the field of toil and the theatre of war, to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints;" and to shrink into sloth, under whatever motives or pretences of meditative piety, cannot be less than disobedience to the Master's will.

No: Christianity does not repeal the law of labour. It finds man in the midst of active engagements, and it binds him to them by fresh ties, animating his toil by higher motives, and sweetening it by new consolations. It instructs us that to labour in our own calling is to "do the will of God," and it encourages us to do it "from the heart," and "as unto the Lord," by the assurance that it shall not be a service either unacceptable or unrewarded.

Christianity does not repeal the law of labour, but it sanctifies it; that is, it forms a character under the ruling influence of which the actual labours of life are to be pursued. The idea we have thus stated branches out into three particulars.

1. In every transaction Christian principles should be carried out.

We might deem the sentiment we have thus enunciated too obvious to be enlarged upon, were it not that a murmur is every now and then heard of its impossibility. Yes, it is true. There are men who say, "We cannot be tradesmen and maintain an inflexible integrity." We must give a serious consideration to this response.

And we may observe, in the first place, that an unqualified admission of its truth would lead to consequences which it would be impossible to admit. For example: if it be true that no man can be a tradesman and yet be of strict veracity and integrity, then the entire mass (for the assertion is universal, and admits of no exceptions) of human industry and traffic is condemned as one huge and flagrant immorality. It is a course of absolute and systematic fraud; it

amounts, with a slight change of expression, to this, that every tradesman is a knave.

Again, it will follow from the same premises, that the requirements of God's law and the arrangements of his providence are at irreconcilable variance: for labour is his will, and the varied forms and processes of human industry arise out of it; and, if these cannot be carried out without violations of the moral law, then we have two portions of the divine ways in direct opposition the one to the other.

And, further, from the same premises it will follow that our secular duty and our spiritual welfare cannot be harmonized. Industry is our duty; but, as we are told, this necessitates breaches of the moral law: but breaches of the moral law expose the transgressors to condemnation, and the Gospel itself, with all its freeness and fulness of pardon, requires the keeping of God's commandments as an evidence of our sincerity. Thus, consequently, are we under incompatible obligations, and compelled to sacrifice the one world to the other—under obligation to pursue a course here which leads to perdition hereafter.

But these things cannot really be so; and they are so evidently contrary to fact and possibility, that we cannot but assure ourselves of the falsity of the premises from which they may be inferred.

In truth, when the assertion which we are considering is looked at more closely, it is found to be manifestly in need of some limitation. Its meaning is, not absolutely that a man cannot be a tradesman and be strictly upright, but that he cannot be a *successful* tradesman on such a principle.

Now we may deal with the assertion so modified in two ways—either by admitting it, or by denying it.

If, on the one hand, we admit it, our reply is founded on the new element introduced into the system, namely, success. You wish to be a successful tradesman, that is, to make large, or, at all events, considerable profits; and you cannot do this, you think, without occasional untruth and deception. You have then two alternatives between which to choose,—small profits and honesty, or large profits and fraud; and you not only hesitate in making your choice, but you actually choose large profits and fraud! What says your conscience to this? Ought you to have hesitated a moment in such a case? And does not the fact that you have hesitated, and more than hesitated, open to you a depth of unprincipled feeling in your own breast at the discovery of which you may well be amazed? Must not the answer of the Christian moralist be given in such an alternative without wavering, “Be content with less profit”? And if you retort, “Then I may as well shut up my shop,” we cannot hesitate in our rejoinder, “Then shut it up; any sacrifice rather than the sacrifice of your integrity.”

On the other hand, however, the assertion that a man cannot be a successful tradesman unless he be to some extent a dishonest one may be denied. The fact, we believe, is not so. That many successful men of business allow themselves in various modes of deception is too true, and they may have found their pecuniary advantage in it; but surely none, not even those who are the loudest on this matter, will maintain that it is universally so. There surely are exceptions, if even such be the rule. But exceptions prove the possibility of the

rule being broken, and reduce the alleged impracticability to a mere matter of difficulty. And it may perhaps be so, that it is more difficult for a strictly honest tradesman to make large profits than for a rogue; but this is just one of the cases to test the principles of men, and to discriminate the one from the other.

And, while it is unquestionably true that some men of the strictest integrity have been eminently successful in business, it is true also that many causes may contribute to the want of success besides a too scrupulous uprightness. The want of diligence and tact, of courtesy and frugality, has powerful tendencies in this direction; and upon these, or causes similar to these, the blame ought probably to be laid, instead of a habit of truth-telling and candour.

It must be added, that a very erroneous view may be taken of the kind and amount of success derivable from acts of deception. They can operate advantageously only while they are unknown; and, as they are always liable to be detected, and almost sure to be detected before long, they yield but temporary and transient benefit. No one likes to be deceived, and every one, having been deceived once, tries to avoid a repetition of the annoyance. The character of a deceptive tradesman is so repulsive that no man will avowedly adopt it. Even the knave, to secure his gains, must feign himself honest. For a continuance, consequently, duplicity has even no money recommendation; but, according to the old adage, honesty is the best policy. It is the dealer whose integrity may be most thoroughly relied upon who will, in the long run, have, if he be equal to his competitors in other things, the best trade.

It should be recollected, also, that, whatever our efforts may be, it does not lie with us to command success. We are in this respect at the disposal of a superior Power, to which we should always direct a reverent and confiding eye. An overruling, all-wise, and holy Providence determines at once the place of our habitation, and the issue of our toils. In vain we rise early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, unless the blessing of God rests upon our endeavours. He can give unexpected success to the simplest means, or annex disappointment to the wisest combinations. Our great object should be to please him, and to be pleased with him; to do what he approves, and to accept what he gives. Now the Lord loveth the upright, but the wrongdoer his soul hateth. Our first and last wisdom is to keep his commandments. If in such a course he indulge us with prosperity, it will be the more delightful to us because it will be attended by a sense of his love; while if, in the same course, he visit us with adversity, we shall be warranted in regarding it as sent in mercy, and fraught with even a richer blessing. Nothing is really less to be coveted than wealth gained by fraud. Should the opportunity ever be presented to you, touch it not; in the end it will sting like an adder, and burn like unquenchable fire.

In a word, to close these remarks, if you be a Christian indeed, be a Christian everywhere;—in your shop, your counting-house, your manufactory, the market, or the exchange. Nowhere, and in no instance, depart from the strictest, most delicate integrity. Christianity itself demands it of you, otherwise it receives dishonour at your hands. And Christianity can supply motives adequate to the efforts

and the sacrifices she demands. Your inestimable peace with God through Jesus Christ, your obligations to his dying and living love, your inexpressible happiness in his favour, and your glorious hope of endless association with him—these and kindred considerations will supply a perennial and triumphant power, by which you shall be enabled to “adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour.”

2. Through all transactions devout affections should be maintained.

The Christian indeed is a man of another world. He no longer looks “at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things which are unseen and eternal,” the greatness and glory of which have, through grace, acquired the command of his heart. He no longer minds the things of the flesh but the things of the Spirit, and he has learnt that “to be spiritually-minded is life and peace.” Not that the Christian is permitted to withdraw himself from this world, or disqualified to act his part in it; but he is both qualified and required to live at once in it and above it. The interests of the present life are by him at once appreciated and subordinated. He feels them, but his sensibility to them is chastened and subdued. They are not his great and leading interests. His conversation is in heaven, and his affections are set on things above. With him, indeed, a devout interest attaches to all earthly duties, since they constitute the path of obedience and the sphere in which he is to glorify God. It is in them that he is to do the will of God as it is done in heaven, at once to find the work of an angel, and to exhibit the spirit of his Lord. Devout affections are not merely possible in such a life, they are necessary. It cannot be sustained without them. They are its soul, its working power. As they wither it dies, and sinks down to carnality and worldliness.

It is true, doubtless, that the maintenance of a spiritual mind amidst earthly duties is not without difficulty. They too powerfully tend to assimilate the mind to themselves, and to render it earthly. Unless restrained with a vigorous hand, they absorb too much of our time, and leave too little for effective converse with the unseen world. But they must be restrained. A Christian must, to a certain extent, be a meditative man. Invisible glories can become influential by no other means. It is only as looked at that they become realities to us. Hence the great, and not merely great but indispensable, importance of devotional retirement. With inflexible resolution, and in the face of all hindrances, a Christian should spend a portion of every day alone with God. At least one short half hour should be daily set apart for earnest communion with heaven, and much more may be profitably so employed. Most precious for this purpose is the period of early morning, and amply repaid will those be who have the firmness to snatch from lingering slumbers the invaluable moments. The inner man thus refreshed and invigorated, the duties of the day may be entered upon with a calm and heavenly mind, apt at occasional fellowship with the best of friends as fleeting opportunities present themselves, and unexhausted in its spiritual energy when the hour of rest arrives. Such should be the habitual attitude of the Christian; his hands in the world, and his heart above the world.

3. The gains of labour should be consecrated to God.

It is not always that labour yields more than a supply for imme-

diate wants. Even in this case, however, a portion of its produce may, by a grateful heart, be consecrated to religious and benevolent uses. But we speak more particularly of those cases in which industry has been largely remunerative, and wealth, in larger or smaller masses, has been accumulated by it. The tendency of an unrenewed heart would be to appropriate all this, and to say, "It is my own; I have laboured for it, and I will enjoy it: I will live luxuriously, and I will leave fortunes to my children." Not so, however, the Christian. Not that he is required to strip himself of his possessions, and, as though it were a sin to be rich, to make himself poor; nor that he is forbidden to avail himself, in wisdom and moderation, of the more abundant accommodations which wealth places within his reach. He has, however, something higher and nobler to do with it. He has to regard his wealth as the fruit of God's blessing on his toil, and as an augmentation of his means of serving at once his Maker and his kind. It is to him an addition of power and opportunity, and both require to be employed conscientiously and gratefully. He is thus endowed with a certain measure of God's bounty, that he may be elevated to an equal measure of God's prerogative as the great distributor of good. God so far permits him to be godlike, that is, communicative; and a true Christian accepts the position with a frank and grateful heart, as one of distinguished privilege and felicity. "This wealth," he is ready to say, "is not my own, but His who gave it me; and I will employ it in the manner which will most eminently please and glorify him. I owe him too much to withhold anything from his service, nor can I put anything I have to so noble a use as to show forth his praise."

It is not necessary to enter into the detail of the manner in which such a general intention might be carried out, variable as it must ever be with our shifting circumstances. Objects and modes of action conducive to the glory of God and the good of men present themselves without number on every hand, and clearly show that Divine Providence has not permitted the accumulation of wealth in reservoirs more or less capacious, without providing channels also in which it may freely flow forth from them to the comfort and rejoicing of suffering humanity.

Such are the influences which Christianity is adapted to exert on the industrial character of individuals. We have yet to glance for a moment at its influence on the industrial character of nations.

On this subject, all that is to be said may be summed up in one observation,—namely, that Christianity tends to the removal of all obstacles to the development of industry.

Obstacles to the full development of the primary law of labour have too notoriously arisen. They are to be found in slavery, caste, taxation, and war. A word on each of these will conclude our observations.

1. Slavery has obstructed the development of the law of labour by throwing an excessive portion of toil upon one class, and by destroying the free agency which the divine institution implies. In the first instance—that is, in paradise—there was no *necessity* of any kind for labour; the precept was founded, as we have shown, solely in reasons of wisdom and expediency. And although, after the fall, there was a

necessity of labour in order to provide sustenance, yet was this necessity of quite a different kind from that which slavery implies. Under this system work is done, not voluntarily, but by physical coercion—by application of the lash, or by terror of severer punishment; and work, not for himself, but for another, who either riots in luxurious sloth, or extorts from the pining and exhausted slave unrighteous gains. This was never the institution of God, but is man's perversion of it. Far from making labour answer a salutary purpose, this system prematurely wastes the body, crushes the soul, and pours out life itself as an offering to the tyrant and the oppressor.

The social evils generated and nourished by the system of slavery have given many warnings of its iniquity, and supplied many reasons for its abolition. All the influences of Christianity, direct and indirect, go in the same direction. The value attached by Christianity to man as man, forbids the oppression and wrong inflicted on him when he is held in bonds. The unqualified appeals and requirements which the Gospel addresses to every man demand universal freedom in order to a compliance with them. The benevolence inspired into the heart of a Christian makes him refuse the position of the oppressor. The light which Christianity throws on the rights and interests of mankind gradually causes the extension of justice even to the long-robbed captive. And thus the industrial character of nations is modified. All are set free to labour for themselves, and are left to labour under the constraints by which Divine Providence enforces it. Each takes his share; or, if he refuse it, he is dealt with by the Supreme Ruler, who corrects or punishes the transgression.

2. In some countries—as in India, for example—the operation of the law of labour has been interfered with by the social institution familiarly known under the name of caste. It results from this institution that the employment of the parents descends necessarily to the children, and whole classes of the community are marked out by it, to whom, from generation to generation, there belong specific occupations and positions in society, from which, if elevated, no one can fall, and, if depressed, no one can rise. This system is clearly too artificial; it is out of harmony with the operation of natural causes. Talent has never been so distributed among mankind that an entire section of society shall be found exclusively adapted to the most menial offices, or, indeed, to any specific employment. The constitutional powers of men are of infinite diversity, and this diversity is often strongly traceable within the limits even of a single family. With a prodigal, and an apparently indiscriminating hand, the beneficent Creator has scattered the elements of genius and power adapted to the whole sphere of human knowledge and action through the entire community of man; and this is a clear indication of his design that the scope of labour should be open to all. To shut up any portion of mankind to be inevitably hewers of wood and drawers of water, and to prohibit the escape from such a doom even of a single individual, however highly gifted, is at once a violation of a natural right, and an immense sacrifice of the general welfare.

Such violations and sacrifices Christianity promises to bring to an end. In countries where caste has been for untold ages maintained, and has become despotic through a venerable antiquity, and its iden-

tity with the sanctions of a false religion, the spread of true religion has already shown its deformity and shaken its power. All who become Christians become brethren; and the distinctions of caste are at once renounced by all who realize at the cross of Christ their common ruin, and their common hope. Hence society itself takes a new form; it becomes one, instead of many—a limitless expanse, instead of a thousand petty and impassable enclosures. Every man is called into action, not to do precisely the thing which was done by his fathers, but to do whatever he can do best. The man of talent is drawn out of his dungeon, and restored to his kind. And thus, in a second instance, Christianity favours the free development of the law of labour.

3. A third obstruction to this development is to be found in that class of fiscal arrangements which have contemplated or entailed restrictions on commerce. Of taxation for revenue we have nothing to say, but that, so far as it is necessary, it is to be submitted to without repining. But there are two kinds of taxation of which our subject leads us to say a few words. The first of these consists of duties avowedly protective, or charges levied on the produce of many countries in order to foster the produce of one; and the second consists of taxes indiscreetly laid, or laid on such articles, and to such an amount, as to operate restrictively on production or exchange. In the most enlightened countries the world has ever known, or knows at this hour, an immense amount of these two kinds of taxation has existed, still exists, and is vehemently pleaded for. The protective system dies hard; yet it is plainly unnatural. If a man raises more than he wants, no reason in nature exists why he should be restricted in his efforts to dispose of it to the best advantage; and, in like manner, if a man wants something which he cannot raise, no reason in nature exists why he should be restricted in his efforts to procure it at the lowest cost. The dictate of nature is that the world's market should be open to the world's produce, or, in other words, that trade should be free. Individual selfishness and short-sighted policy have suggested many and wide departures from this rule, but experience has shown the folly of them. Their effect has been to limit the productiveness of the earth, and the industry of mankind. The fetters of human industry, however, are loosening, and the earth is beginning to augment her fruitfulness. And Christianity favours this progress of political wisdom. Tending to create a universal brotherhood, it will sanction no arrangements which, for the transient interest of a part, make a sacrifice of the interest of the whole.

4. The last cause we have named as obstructing the development of the law of labour is war. To how melancholy an extent this greatest of human scourges, and of human crimes, has thwarted and impeded industry, is too notorious to need statement here. Armies are vast masses of men who ought to be engaged in productive labour grievously misemployed; battles are methods of putting out of existence large numbers of men who ought to be consumers of produce; while the array of nation against nation puts a stop to commerce, and drives each within itself in a spirit of hatred and of fear. The friend of Industry is Peace: under her benign aspect every man may sit

under his vine and his fig-tree, none making him afraid. Every hand is available to produce; every mouth is open to consume. Every country opens its ports to its neighbour; and the undivided energies of mankind are directed to promote the highest welfare of the whole.

To this happy consummation, also, Christianity tends. It eradicates the passions out of which wars arise: a part of its glorious promise is that men shall learn war no more; and progress is surely, although too slowly, making towards the time when men shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks. Thus may the glory of the Lord be speedily revealed! "Then shall the earth yield her increase, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him."



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